LIFE OF ST. CATHARINE OF SIENNA

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LIFE

OF

ST. CATHARINE OF SIENNA.

BY

EDWARD L. AYME, M.D.

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✝MICHAEL AUGUSTINE,
Archbishop of New York.

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To THE

Rev. C. H. McKenna, O.P.,

Father, Friend, and Guide
to the members of the Third Order of St. Dominic,
who, living in the world,
are bound to each other and to him
in the
Great Dominican Family,
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
as a token of
affection, esteem, and gratitude.

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INTRODUCTION.

Recounting the glorious deeds of the heroes and heroines of the Church, as well as of the State, would seem to be the sublimest form of gratitude and praise. For while it commemorates their greatness, it perpetuates their actions by arousing emulation in the hearts of others. The most perfect manner of showing our appreciation of their heroism is learning the lessons of their unselfishness and self-sacrifice ; the most certain way of seeking what they obtained is walking in their footsteps.

The life of St. Catharine of Siena was eminently one of heroic devotion to God and to her neighbor. The facts of this wonderful life have been given to us by her Confessor, Fr. Raymond of Capua, to whom Catharine revealed all that had transpired from her childhood. Translations of his work have been made by Cartier, De Malan, and others. These in turn have been translated, but often so imperfectly that the real meaning has been at times obscured; or they have been so mingled with contemporaneous history as to lessen

their devout character. The principal object of this little volume is to present these facts of her life in so simple a manner that they will of themselves appeal to the mind and heart of all readers, and arouse the spirit of devotion that St. Catharine so earnestly strove, during her whole life, to excite in the souls of men.

It is hoped that, since this is the main purpose for which the little book is published, the defects and shortcomings of the writer will be overlooked in the greatness and perfection of his subject. St. Catharine alone will then speak, and tell again of how she lived for God and how she loved Him.

EDWARD L. AYMÉ.

CONTENTS.

PAGE

INTRODUCTION v

CHAPTER I.

Catharine's Birthplace and Parentage 1

CHAPTER II.

Birth and Childhood of Catharine 5

CHAPTER III.

Catharine's Vow of Virginity 10

CHAPTER IV.

Catharine's Fervor assailed; her Patience during Great Persecutions 13

CHAPTER V.

Catharine's Austerities and her Mother's quiet Opposition 24

CHAPTER VI.

The Ordeal of the Bath. Catharine invested with the Habit of the Order of St. Dominic 28

CHAPTER VII.

Origin of the Order of the Sisters of Penance of St. Dominic, and their Rules 33

CHAPTER VIII.

PAGE

Catharine's Advance in the Grace of God. Divine Instruction concerning her Visions 37

CHAPTER IX.

Doctrines taught Catharine by Our Lord. Her adoption of them as Life-rules..... 42

CHAPTER X.

Catharine's Great Victories over Temptation. Her Wonderful Intimacy with God..... 46

CHAPTER XI.

Catharine's Espousal to Our Lord, and the Miraculous Ring given her..... ... 53

CHAPTER XII.

Catharine's Lifework indicated to her by Our Lord..... 56

CHAPTER XIII.

Wonderful Occurrences at the Beginning of her Mission. Her Inexhaustible Charity..... 60

CHAPTER XIV.

Wonders performed by Catharine while attending the Sick.. 68

CHAPTER XV.

Catharine's Miraculous Fasting and the Criticism it caused.. 87

CHAPTER XVI.

Catharine's Ecstasies and her Wonderful Revelations from God..... 93

CHAPTER XVII.

PAGE

Miracles performed by Catharine..... 117

CHAPTER XVIII.

Other Extraordinary Miracles..... 135

CHAPTER XIX.

Catharine casts out Evil Spirits..... 150

CHAPTER XX.

Catharine's Gift of Prophecy..... 156

CHAPTER XXI.

Catharine's Miraculous Power over Inanimate Things..... 170

CHAPTER XXII.

Catharine's Frequent Communions. Miracles that occurred during them..... 177

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Closing Scenes in Catharine's Active Life..... 185

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Beginning of the End..... 192

CHAPTER XXV.

Her Death..... 198

LIFE

OF

ST. CATHARINE OF SIENA.

CHAPTER I.

CATHARINE'S BIRTHPLACE AND PARENTAGE.

In the northern part of Italy, on the undulating plains of Tuscany, lies ancient Siena, called "the City of the Blessed Virgin." For centuries, almost, it was the centre of many stirring scenes that marked the progress of the Church of God. And though now forgotten, as it were, among the many thriving cities that have sprung up around it, yet its beauty and glory have not departed from it. Its towers and fortifications still speak of its ancient military prowess; its domes and spires point unerringly to its foundation in the love of God; while the pages of its history are illuminated by the life and labors of that other handmaid of the Lord, St. Catharine.

In passing along the old street of Oca on the way to

the convent of the Friar Preachers is seen a house of humble appearance, and near it a little chapel. This house was formerly called the Fullonica, and was the workshop of Giacomo Benincasa, the honest dyer of Siena, a man just and gentle, and of deep religious convictions and unassailable probity. Having by his industry established a flourishing business and acquired a competence, he was enabled to choose a wife and commence a life of domestic happiness; for, being alone in the world, he needed some one to whom he could look for help and companionship. He found in a young Sienese girl named Lapa Piaganti, the attractions of a sweet disposition and a lovable character; she proved to be a good housekeeper and a tender mother. Although of a devout nature, she had more than a tinge of worldliness in her character, which caused her many trials that otherwise would have been avoided.

God blessed the union of Giacomo and Lapa, and the little ones came to them rapidly, one every year and often two. They had twenty-five children.

Giacomo was a man of gentle character and of moderate speech. No matter how great the provocation, he never showed the least violence or irritation. When he found any of his friends or family sad or angry, he would put on a smiling countenance and try to console them, saying: "Come now, everything is for the best; never let us be discouraged, or speak hastily." An instance of his justness, as well as of his abiding faith in God, is well shown in the following. He had been very badly treated and even threatened with ruin by a merchant who claimed from him unjustly a large sum of

money. Nevertheless he would not allow any one to speak harshly of his enemy; and when Lapa, aroused by a sense of injustice, let fall some words of bitterness, he said to her : " Let him alone, dear, let him alone ; God will protect us, and show him his error." And it was not long before the man found out his mistake and made ample apology.

But what distinguished Giacomo was the sanctity of his mind, which tempered his words with a modesty and reserve that endeared him to all. By his example he so led his family to practise these ennobling virtues that they could not bear any irregularity in the speech of others. His children when they married carried the influence and training of their wise father to their own homes. One of his daughters, named Buonaventura, was married to a young Sienese called Nicolas. Having been left an orphan at an early age, this young man's moral training had been neglected, and his conversation was unguarded and at times offensive. His wife, who had been raised in purity and innocence, was so much affected by his laxity that she fell into a sort of melancholy and soon lost health and strength. Nicolas loved her tenderly, and seeing her daily growing weaker inquired the cause. In a sad voice she replied : " In my father's house I never heard such language as daily I am compelled to listen to here. It is the cause of all my wretchedness ; and if it continues, it will surely end my days." Profoundly moved by these words, and lost in admiration at the purity of his wife, he resolved never again to cause her a moment's sorrow, and warned his companions to avoid

all offensive language while in his house. So oftentimes that Giacomo's modesty corrected the thoughtlessness of those about him.

It was in this ancient city, surrounded by the lowly peace and love of kindred hearts, as well as by the sin and wickedness that the evil one ever seeks to excite in the souls of men against the laws of God, that those eyes, destined later to behold the Saviour, opened upon the world, whose thousands they would move; it was here that those little hands first stretched towards Heaven, from which their strength would come; it was here that the holy saint, with but her feeble woman's word, tore from the grasp of the devouring demon the precious souls God sent her to save. It was here that Catharine, virgin spouse of Christ, gave to God the jewels of her life, that men might be ransomed from the slavery of sin.

CHAPTER II.

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD OF CATHARINE.

THE hand of divine Providence, that was to lead the saintly Catharine through the weakness of infancy, the perils of her early girlhood, and to sustain and guide the woman to perfection in His holy love, was evidenced from the very beginning of her life. In 1347 Lapa, her mother, gave to the world two delicate daughters at one birth, and, not being able to nourish both of them, she was compelled to resign one to the care of a friend. But which one? Between her two infants it is impossible for a mother to decide which to relinquish. So she commended herself to God. It was whispered in her heart to keep the little one called Catharine, who was destined, as the spouse of Christ, to carry peace and faith and salvation to mankind during her life, and after death to be a shining pillar of His love for all ages to come. The other infant had received the name of Jane, but lived only long enough to leave a memory here, then winged her way back to the Creator, to wait with Him the coming of her sister.

As a child Catharine endeared herself to all by the sweet simplicity of her conversation, which, even at this early age, acquired a tone that revealed a messenger from God. So edifying were her childlike discourses

that the neighbors and her relatives would take her to their houses, to enjoy the budding wisdom of this little flower of heaven. And in their simple way they called her, not Catharine, but Euphrosyne, which means joy, satisfaction. When scarcely five years old, she would stop on each step of the stairs to say one Hail Mary, bending her little knee in veneration of the Blessed Mother as she went up or came down. She showed in many other ways her instinctive love of heaven, that gave promise of future sanctity.

It was when she was a little more than six years of age that there was presented to her the first one of those astonishing visions which later were to be of almost daily occurrence and in which was revealed to her the Blessed Saviour and His holy will. Her mother had sent her on an errand to her sister Buonaventura's house, accompanied by her brother Stephen. This duty they executed, and bent their steps homeward through the valley Piatta. As she wandered along the picturesque valley, her eyes as usual raised above, she saw over the roof of the church of the Friar Preachers a glorious vision of the Saviour, in pontifical garments, seated on a great white throne, and on His sacred brow a tiara. Around Him were St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. John the Evangelist. Overcome with admiration and love for Him who had thus manifested Himself to her, Catharine remained motionless; while the Redeemer, gazing on her with serene majesty and tenderness, extended His hand in blessing. Her little brother Stephen had meanwhile continued on ahead, supposing that his sister was following; but on turning

around, he found her far behind, and gazing enraptured up to heaven. He called to her loudly, and receiving no reply he went to her and, taking her by the hand, said: "What are you doing there? Why do you not come?" Catharine started as though from a deep sleep, and regarded him for a moment like one in doubt, then cried to him: "Oh! if you saw what I see, you would never have disturbed me from such a sweet vision;" and again her eyes sought the heavens. But all had vanished, leaving to her tearful sight the deep blue sky and a faint glimmer from the distant evening star. From that moment the child's intelligence quickly ripened to maturity, so much had divine love inflamed her heart and enlightened her understanding.

She felt the Holy Spirit within her, and was moved to imitate the lives of the holy monks and hermits, about whom, she declared later, she had been divinely instructed, but more especially that of the holy St. Dominic. This desire having taken complete possession of her, she endeavored to gratify it by seeking secluded places, as far from prying eyes as possible, where she would scourge her little body with a discipline made by herself; and when not so engaged, she gave the time to meditation and continual prayer, striving to emulate these devout men by shunning all the amusements of a child, watching over her tongue by keeping silence as long as possible, and even trying to diminish the quantity of her food. She showed thus beyond doubt that the ascetic child was but a foreshadowing of the self-sacrificing saint. True to her

nature, she sought to influence other girls to similar deeds of penance and devout practices; and when they were gathered in a remote room of the house, she would prescribe them certain rules, and recitations of the "Our Father" and "Hail Mary," together with austerities they were to practise when alone.

Fired by the desire to emulate the recluse monks and hermits of old, Catharine also resolved to seek the solitude of the desert; and, filled only with this one wish, she did not stop to consider the means necessary to attain that end, but one day, commending herself to God, set out in the direction of the valley of the vision. Presently she had left the city far behind, and emerged on a thinly settled plain, which, seeing the houses so distant from one another, she supposed was the longed-for "desert." She went to a little wooded knoll, and found beneath a projecting rock a sort of grotto, which seemed to her to be made for a solitude. Throwing herself on her knees, she adored the gracious Master, who she supposed had led her there to stay for ever. Then, as in the intensity of her prayer she forgot her surroundings, she felt herself being slowly lifted quite a distance from the ground, and sustained there by no visible means, her heart meanwhile being occupied with God. As she suspected that this might be some snare of Satan, she never relaxed the fervor of her devotions or invocations, but prayed that God might reveal to her His purpose. And she heard, she knew not from where, a voice saying: "Return to thy father's house, my daughter; thine hour of sacrifice has not yet come." Looking around, she found herself again upon the

ground, and with a troubled heart she gazed towards the distant city, where she knew her parents would soon be searching for their lost child. Then turning to Him who through her whole life was her ever-present and constant recourse, she bowed her little head and closed her eyes in mute appeal. A moment only, then in her ears sounded again the busy hum of the great city, and looking up she found herself no longer in the grotto on the distant plain, but at the gates of Siena, whither a miracle of God's grace had carried her.

CHAPTER III.

CATHARINE'S VOW OF VIRGINITY.

These manifestations of the presence and power of the Blessed Redeemer caused the heart of this holy child of destiny to so expand with love for Him and His beloved mother that all else in this life seemed to her, though but a girl in years, as of but little importance. Thus the green shell encases the lily-bud, that, as the flower expands, is thrust below, to serve merely as a protection to the precious blossom within, and not itself to be the object of any thoughtful care or solicitude. Her heart longed for the vow of perpetual virginity, absolute purity of body and soul, that she might thereby be united for ever to the Saviour. In her yearning she implored the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, to obtain for her the absorbing desire of her life, and that light might be given her to see her way to its accomplishment, which would at the same time be the means of her soul's salvation, while conforming to the will of God.

Pursuing this idea with all the ardor of her virgin innocence, which she sought to preserve for her heavenly Spouse, she never relaxed her petitions. One day, unable to suppress the emotions aroused in her by the divine Spirit, kneeling and alone, she poured forth her

heart in earnest prayer to the Blessed Mother, and, veritably inspired, concluded her appeal thus: "O Mother of Christ, I promise thy Son and thee never to accept any other spouse than Him, my Saviour, and, with the help of God, to keep myself pure and unsullied for the spotless lamb." As she arose from her knees, she felt within her heart that her prayer had been heard and her vow accepted. When she had advanced farther in the path of perfection and the Master's love, a miraculous ceremony cemented this espousal.

This perpetual vow removed from her mind the great fear that she might be separated from Him she loved and left her free to pursue the sanctification that imitation of His life alone can bestow, and thereby become worthy of her glorious Spouse. She sought, by denying herself nutritious food, foregoing all pleasure, and scourging her body, to crucify her flesh and bring it into subjection to the spirit.

She began slowly to feel an ardent desire springing up in her heart to help the many unhappy souls she saw in misery about her, because they knew not God, and therefore she held in special veneration and love the holy St. Dominic the ardent lover of his neighbor.

She never neglected an opportunity of showing her devotion to the Redeemer, and as an example of piety commanded the respect of all who knew her. One day, Lapa, wishing to have a Mass said in honor of St. Anthony, sent Catharine, who was little more than ten years of age, to the curate with the request and an offering of money and candles. The pious child fulfilled her mother's commission, but, wishing to add her

own prayers to what she felt was being done for the honor and glory of God, she remained until the Mass was finished, returning home only at the conclusion of the office that as usual followed it, at the church of the Friar Preachers. On her return, her mother, annoyed at her prolonged absence, and without waiting to inquire the cause, reproved her for being dilatory, saying, in the words common to her class: "Cursed be the tongue that pretends that thou shouldst not have returned sooner!"

Catharine received the chiding in silence; but presently she turned to her mother, saying, in her serious subdued manner: "Dear mother, whenever I commit any fault, or execute your orders badly, punish me, beat me if you will, to teach me to do my duty better; but I entreat you for my sake never let yourself curse any one, good or bad. It is not nice in a person of your age, and grieves me very much; besides it offends the Father."

Lapa was abashed at the reproof administered by her child, but greatly edified when she discovered later from the curate the cause of her delay.

Thus her conduct as she advanced in years was a lesson to all, and showed beyond doubt the beautiful flower of divine love that was springing up in the heart of the holy child, afterward to bear rich and lasting fruit to famished souls.

CHAPTER IV.

CATHARINE'S FERVOR ASSAILED; HER PATIENCE DURING GREAT PERSECUTIONS.

Days came and went, and the little Catharine, faithful to her chosen One, filled them all with acts of charity, of self-sacrifice, penance, and love for the Creator; and, while her mind was thus expanding and drinking in the lessons of perfection that her inspired acts taught her, her body also took on a firmer mould, and from her face shone the reflected beauty of the pure soul within. Living in a country where the warm sunshine and cloudless sky bring quickly to maturity the physical endowments of the female sex, Catharine's budding womanhood did not pass unnoticed. Her mother could not help but observe the growing tendency of her child to shun the attentions of the other sex and devote herself entirely to God. Nevertheless, in opposition to the natural instinct thus displayed, and wrapped up in the worldly career and happiness of her child, Lapa compelled the shrinking maiden to adorn herself with glittering ornaments and brightly colored gowns, in order that her slender figure and sweet face might win for her a worthy husband.

Fearing to inflict pain on those she loved, Catharine had never spoken of the secret vow she had made, consecrating her virginity to God; so that, divining the rea-

son of this adornment, she submitted very reluctantly to what was so contrary to her wish and nature—a submission that cost her many a bitter pang, and which she was permitted to make in order that she might learn to be guided only by the Holy Spirit.

Lapa could not help grieving at an opposition she did not understand, being in complete ignorance, as were all the family, of her daughter's vow ; and supposing that it was but maiden shyness and a foolish whim, she summoned to her aid her married daughter Buonaventura, for whom Catharine cherished a great tenderness, besecching her to use the influence she held over her sister, and persuade her to adopt the dress and ornaments suitable to her years and expectations.

The mother's hopes were not disappointed, and for a time, at least, Catharine seemed to yield to the influence and example of her elder sister, and allowed herself to be occupied with her toilet. But this did not last long; and never for a moment, as she herself declared afterwards, had she entertained even the thought of renouncing her vow. In fact, far from trying to please the other sex at any time, she would fly on their approach, as nothing was more painful to her than to be compelled to be in their company. She avoided her father's apprentices, and even refrained from looking at the passers-by. It was the fear that by yielding to her mother's and sister's wishes she was infringing her solemn promise that caused her so much mental anguish, and for which in after-years she never ceased to upbraid herself.

This slight relaxation caused her the keenest remorse, for it seemed to her that, after having received so many unmerited graces from her Creator, she deserved eternal punishment for the precious time she had wasted in adorning her body. Yet she explained her action fully when she said that she had loved her sister and mother only too well when she inclined to their persuasion, instead of listening to the voice of God.

Thus for a time she was tried in the crucible of temptation, to come forth untarnished, a beautiful white soul, ever to be in the Master's keeping.

After this trying incident Catharine devoted her entire time to devout practices. She allowed herself but a short period for repose, and partook of food sparingly, and sometimes not at all. She increased the severity of her penances and the punishment to which she subjected her flesh, and in every way sought to obtain that degree of perfection which was to make her life such a glorious example to others. This end was furthered when the only influence that had operated otherwise was removed. Buonaventura died suddenly. Thus God seemed to bind still closer to Him this holy child, by removing from her path the sister she had loved too well, and leaving her to Himself alone.

The death of her sister, which was the first time she had witnessed the passing of God's ever-present messenger, opened her eyes more fully to the emptiness of all worldly vanity, and brought to her a keen realization not only of the briefness of life, but of the awful nearness of the Creator. And, thinking what she had

done in yielding to her sister's influence a grievous sin, there sprung up in her heart a devotion to St. Mary Magdalen, whose contrition she earnestly strove to excite within herself.

There now commenced a series of persecutions by the evil one that but served to give a calm inflexibility to Catharine's character, and in spiritual matters to give her endurance, patience, and constancy, in all of which the presence of the divine Master's sustaining hand was plainly evident.

The loss of Buonaventura was keenly felt by Catharine's relatives, and they were not long in devising means intended to break the intense aversion Catharine had evinced to marriage. They compelled her to dress according to their wishes, and to receive the attention of those from among whom they thought she might choose a suitable companion. They sought as much as possible to shorten her hours of solitude, and by words and example to win her to their cause. But all their strategy and persuasion only increased her austerities and devotions, and fixed more firmly her determination to give herself wholly to God.

Finally, in desperation, they resolved to enlist the power of the Church in enforcing obedience to them, and to that end called in one of the Friar Preachers with whom they were not acquainted, and who knew nothing of the circumstances of the case, and besought him to use his influence and authority, and obtain her consent. This not only did not succeed, but it precipitated the very result they sought to avert; for when the good priest, on conversing with Catharine, discovered

what a beautiful character he was called on to assist in changing, and to what sublime heights her pure soul aspired, he was happy in being able to aid her in her design, saying: "Since you have decided to consecrate yourself to God, and are opposed by those who surround you, prove to them that your resolution to remain a virgin is not to be shaken, by cutting off this beautiful head of hair that adds so much to your attractiveness, and then perhaps they will cease their importunities."

With a cry of joy on hearing this counsel, that seemed to come to her from Heaven, so perfect a solution it was of her great trouble, Catharine flew to her room, and in a trice her head was shorn of the beautiful tresses; and her heart bounded in secret happiness at the thought of her freedom. Not wishing to suddenly inflict this great disappointment on her family, but particularly her mother, whose heart was set on having her wedded, Catharine covered her head with a sort of veil, at that time worn only by older women. But the eyes of the watchful mother soon noticed the change in her daughter's appearance, and seeing her wearing a veil, she inquired the reason. Unable to tell a falsehood, and not daring to reveal the sad havoc the scissors had made with her wealth of hair, Catharine tried to evade answering; but the mother, feeling that she was concealing something from her, but never suspecting what it was, went up to her and snatched the protecting veil from her shorn head. Dumfounded with astonishment, Lapa fell back a step, and when the truth dawned on her gave way to shrieks of disappointed rage that aroused the whole household, who,

sympathizing in her grief, naturally joined in her resentment. This took the form of physical persecution which was even more malignant than the former one. That at least had given her some time to devote to pious practices, while now they sought, by loading her down with all sorts of menial work, to deprive her entirely of all opportunity to commune with God. They even dismissed their servant, in order to humiliate her to the utmost, by compelling her to take her place. To this harsh treatment they added such contempt and reproaches as were most painful to her sensitive nature; and then they would suggest to her how, by an advantageous marriage, she would benefit not alone herself, but all the family. Thus they sought to weaken her will and wear out her patience and courage.

But through it all Catharine remained serene and calm; these constant attacks served only to strengthen her patience and constancy, and she suffered no change in her love for the Spouse of her faith. In fact they only added fresh fuel to the inextinguishable fire of love for God burning in her heart, inasmuch as she was inspired to utilize these very affronts and labors to maintain her soul in peace, by reflecting on the labors of Our Lord, on the sorrows of the Virgin, and the trials of the apostles, all of whom she thus endeavored to serve. For the divine Spirit so nourished and sustained her with consolations such as only He can give, that reward followed every trial.

Catharine was not even allowed the privilege of a separate apartment, but was compelled to share the room of her youthful brother Stephen; but this did not

deter her from practising the devotions of which she never wearied. During his absence by day, whenever an opportunity presented, she would slip into the room, there to kneel, if only for a moment, in adoration. But it was at night, when her brother, as well as the rest of the household, was wrapped in deep slumber, that she, all unmindful of her poor tired, overworked body, would give herself up completely to fervent prayer, contemplation, and gratitude to God. At these times her constant ejaculation was: "God, make immaculate my body and soul."

It was while in this room, one day, there was revealed to her father, in an extraordinary manner, that the Holy Spirit was watching over his child. Having a spare moment that day, Catharine had gone to her room as usual, and was engaged in fervent devotion, although the door was open, she having been forbidden to close it at any time. Her father entered hastily in search of something, and glancing around noticed his daughter kneeling in the far corner of the room; and looking closer he saw a white dove poised above her head. Doubting his senses, he approached to see it nearer; but at the first step it took flight, and disappeared through the open window. Going to Catharine, he laid his hand gently on her shoulder, saying in a subdued tone: "My child, what dove was that I saw just now above thy head, and which flew away as I came near?" She replied without rising: "Father, I saw no dove, nor did I know that there was one in the room." Filled with wonder not unmixed with fear, Giacomo silently

turned away, his mind busy with the serious reflections that this occurrence aroused.

The constancy with which she continued her devotions, and the courage she displayed in bearing all that their resentment had heaped on her, won at last the admiration of her brothers, who acknowledged among themselves their utter defeat. And her father, who now watched her silently with greater interest and affection, began to realize that his daughter was not following a passing fancy, but obeying an inspiration from Almighty God. Thereafter her burdens were made lighter, soon to be lifted away entirely.

For a long time Catharine had cherished an eager desire to be invested with the habit of the Sisters of Penance, an order founded by the illustrious St. Dominic, feeling that in the holy garb of religion she would be able to fulfil more securely her vow of virginity. And realizing more and more the dangers to which she was exposed in neglecting to take advantage of what was so obviously the best means for accomplishing her vow, she continually invoked the intercession of the holy founder of the order in her behalf.

Seeing the earnestness of her purpose and the holiness of her desire, her divine Spouse vouchsafed an answer to her prayer. She was kneeling by her lowly cot one night, gazing at the infinite wonders of the Creator shining in the silent heavens, her heart full of prayer that God might grant her wish, when suddenly the space she looked on became peopled with a joyous company, whom, as they approached, she recognized as the holy saints who had founded all the various re-

ligious orders throughout the world. Among them was the great St. Dominic, whom she could easily distinguish, for he bore in his hand a lily of dazzling whiteness, which, though flaming, yet remained unconsumed. One by one they advanced and asked her to select an order, so that in greater security and perfection she might accomplish her vow. None seemed to attract to her, until St. Dominic came to where she was, bearing the habit of the Sisters of Penance, which he presented to her with these words: "My daughter, be of good heart, and firm of purpose, and staunch in courage; the happy day will come when you shall be clothed in this habit of piety and penance you so much desire." The promise shadowed forth in these words aroused in her such emotions of joy that a flood of tears fell from her eyes, which in the presence of the saint had humbly sought the floor. When she lifted them again she was alone.

So powerful was the effect of this vision, and so comforting withal, that, in the full assurance of her sublime faith, she resolved to end at once and for ever the strife that kept her from wearing the livery of her Blessed Spouse. The next day, when her family were gathered together after the evening meal, Catharine, recalling to her mind the prophetic words of the vision, spoke to them thus: "The day has come to open my heart to you. It is now a long time that you have been endeavoring to force me into marriage, which you could not help but know, from my words and actions, I have always held in abhorrence. I have hitherto kept silent regarding my objections, on account of the obedience

due to you, my parents, and my desire not to grieve you. But now that I have arrived at the age of discretion, and can appreciate more thoroughly the consequences of my acts, and their influence on my future, I may no longer conceal it, but speak freely. Know, then, I have taken a solemn vow before Jesus Christ and His Blessed Mother, consecrating to Him my virginity, and promising with their help to serve them with a spotless body and soul. Though scarcely more than a child when first I took this vow, yet I never have had reason or desire to renounce it. And so to-day I come before you with full knowledge of the consequences of my act, and repeat again my unalterable resolution. It will be useless for you to persist in your attempts to induce me to change my mind, for it would be easier to soften a rock than to alter my determination. Renounce, therefore, all these projects for an earthly union, and hearken with me to the voice of God. If you still are willing to retain me as a servant in your house, I will cheerfully render you all the service in my power; but if, by your persistence, you force me to depart, I will go hence, certain that my Spouse, who holds the earth in the hollow of His hand, will provide for all my wants, and shield me from every harm. The vow I have taken before my Saviour shall be as a bond between us, to be dissolved when no longer needed in the eternity of love."

Catharine's simple eloquence and self-sacrifice, and the memory of all the suffering they had caused her, so touched the hearts of her family that they could not restrain their tears, and their grief at first prevented

any answer to the devout girl's appeal. They realized that they could offer no further opposition to her determination, when they found that she was ready to depart from her home and loved ones, in obedience to the guiding spirit within her.

When they had recovered from their emotion, the father, feeling the full conviction of his child's destiny, replied in broken tones: "My loved and gifted child, may God preserve us from longer opposing His manifest will! I can see that He has inspired you, and that you have been actuated only by the Spirit of divine grace. Accomplish with entire freedom the vow you have taken, and obey the Holy Spirit that commands you. Henceforth we will place no obstacles in the path in which God has placed your feet, but will, by assisting you, seek to become worthy of the promises of that Spouse who chose you at such a tender age." Then turning to the rest, but addressing his words more particularly to his wife, he continued: "From this time forward let no one attempt to hinder or annoy my inspired child, or seek to turn her from her saintly resolution. Let her love for God be her only guide in serving the Saviour, and may her prayers for us find such acceptance before her Blessed Spouse that our guilty conduct may be pardoned, and His blessing rest upon this household."

Catharine once more enjoyed the love and affection of her family, and after embracing them fondly she retired to the little corner of her brother's room, where her heart, expanded with joy and peace, struggled to express in words to her heavenly Spouse the sense of gratitude that stirred it to its depths.

CHAPTER V.

CATHARINE'S AUSTERITIES AND HER MOTHER'S QUIET OPPOSITION.

THE violent opposition of her family having been in a great measure overcome, Catharine was free to serve God, and love her chosen Spouse, according to the dictates of her conscience, guided by the Holy Spirit. She selected a little empty room away from the rest, which she converted into a penitent's cell, where she could scourge her frail body at will, and worship God in silent solitude.

She now commenced to practise, among her other austerities, extraordinary abstinence from all but the coarsest food, diminishing its quantity and quality to such an extent that her meals consisted of only a little bread and some uncooked vegetables. From her childhood she had deprived herself of all animal food, and so accustomed had she become to this habit that even the odor of meat was offensive. It was the same with anything sweetened: if by accident or the design of solicitous friends sugar was introduced into her food or drink, her stomach would reject it. Of wine she drank sparingly, and then so diluted it with water as to render it almost tasteless. Even this small quantity she finally abandoned entirely,

drinking only water. The quantity of food she partook of being insufficient, her stomach became incapable of performing its functions properly, so that finally she remained without food or drink almost continuously. Yet her physical force was in great measure sustained, and she was able to support great fatigue and suffering. That this was not the result of a graduated abstinence is very evident, inasmuch as her labors and penances made a greater demand on her constitution than even the slight amount of material she consumed could ever have supplied. The strength of her body seemed to be maintained by the activity of the spirit that inhabited it, sustained by the grace of God. In fact her existence was a miracle. Such an example of prolonged abstinence has never been equalled, covering, as will be seen in a later chapter, a long space of years. Instances are frequent in the lives of some of the saints of long fasts, but these were for periods of days only, and often in the peace and seclusion of the desert, or in the monastery, away from the many and varied temptations of the world; while this wonderful blossom of innocence, without spiritual direction other than that whispered in her heart from above, surrounded by all that could tend to make her life one of ease and comfort, and with all manner of obstacles to beset her path, attained, as will be seen at another period of her life, a degree of abstinence that remains almost unique in sacred or profane history.

A few bare planks sufficed her for a bed, and on these she extended her feeble body, without other covering than her ordinary clothing, when taking the slight re-

pose that she allowed herself. In the beginning she extended her vigils and meditations till the matin bell called the Dominicans to divine office at midnight, but gradually she shortened the time given to rest, so that often she would pass the entire night in prayer and meditation. She admitted that this triumph over sleep was gained only after many battles, and that no victory had cost her so much effort.

Under her dress she wore haircloth for a long time, but, finding that it interfered with that purity which the soul craved even in its bodily envelope, she exchanged it for a broad iron chain, which she drew so tightly around her that it sank into the flesh. This she wore continuously till almost the close of her life, when it was removed by her companions on account of the alarming weakness the pain occasioned by it produced.

Catharine's mother could not acquiesce quietly in these austere practices, for, with the eyes of love, she considered only the body of her child. This gave an opportunity to the ever-ready tempter to further annoy her whom he could not subdue. When Lapa discovered that Catharine was lying on rough boards, she compelled her, unknown to the rest, to leave her cell and share her mother's bed. Then it was that Catharine displayed, in the sweetness and docility of her conduct, the perfect humility and obedience to which she aspired. Without a murmur she calmed her mother with words full of tenderness, and promised to do as she requested, and retiring with her at night, she would lie on the very edge of the bed, rapt in meditation, till

deep slumber fell upon the tired mother; then she would quietly return to her solitude and prayers.

But Lapa was not long in discovering the absence of her daughter, and when she reproved her for it Catharine still found a means of quieting her mother without mitigating her austerities. She slipped a plank under the sheet on her side of the couch. And when the too-anxious mother found how she had been baffled, in despair of overcoming such perseverance she said to her: "I see my efforts to give you ease are futile. Well, do now as you wish, but do not let me know, as it grieves me greatly." So Catharine again retired to her little cell, where, extended on the hard boards, she could more easily recall the cruel cross of Calvary.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ORDEAL OF THE BATH. CATHARINE INVESTED WITH THE HABIT OF ST. DOMINIC.

CATHARINE had never for a moment relinquished her cherished hope of soon seeing fulfilled the promise given her in the last vision, and in her conversations she continually referred to the happy hour when she should shield her vow for ever under the protecting habit of St. Dominic. With this object in view she urged her mother to aid her in the design.

But Lapa had not given up entirely all hopes of being able to wean Catharine away from her austerities, and eventually from a religious life. Not wishing to oppose her directly, the mother resorted to the subterfuge of feigning a slight indisposition, which demanded a visit to some neighboring springs where hot sulphur-baths were given, and urged her daughter to accompany her. As usual Catharine obeyed. And, strangely enough, the very means that Lapa sought to distract her daughter from her severe penances only served to furnish her a new form of torture. These baths were supplied by short canals leading from the boiling sulphur-springs. Catharine would enter the baths with her mother, but, when unobserved, she would approach the springs where the burning heat and vapor could torment

her tender skin—a form of punishment much worse than her sharp scourge of steel. Later in her life, when questioned on this point by her confessor, she explained her ability to bear this atrocious torture thus: "When I approached the boiling springs I thought of the pains of hell and purgatory; and I besought my Creator, whom I had so often offended, to deign to accept, for the torments I merited, those that I then voluntarily underwent; and the thought that perhaps He, in His mercy, would consent to this so filled my soul with heavenly consolation that I was happy in the midst of my pain."

Finding, on her return from the baths, where she had remained as long as possible, that all her efforts had only resulted in an increase of Catharine's austerities, and unable to oppose any longer the importunities of her daughter, Lapa was constrained to request from the Sisters of Penance that Catharine receive the habit of the Order. The Sisters replied that it was contrary to their custom to bestow the habit on young maidens; that only widows of mature age, who wished to consecrate the rest of their lives to God, were admitted; for, inasmuch as they had no cloisters, each Sister was required to be able to govern herself at home. Secretly rejoicing in her heart, Lapa returned home with the answer. Catharine, nothing abashed by this refusal, but trusting fully in the heavenly promise revealed to her in the vision, pleaded with her to renew her request to the Sisters with greater insistence, explaining to them how ardently she yearned for the garb of Christ. But this like the former visit proved fruitless.

Feeling in her heart that this happiness was only postponed for a time, and thinking that perhaps she did not yet merit that favor, Catharine returned to the little works of charity that often occupied her among the poor, her heart resigned to wait the will of God. Then it was that the divine Master in His inscrutable wisdom opened to her, through sickness, the doors that human foresight sought to keep for ever shut. An epidemic of smallpox breaking out at this time, Catharine was seized with the malady. Her poor mother watched and nursed her with great solicitude, for of all her children she loved this one the best, seeking to console her by granting her every wish. Catharine, whose ardor in the pursuit of her one object even suffering had not sufficed to stifle, profited by her mother's frame of mind to again make the request, saying: "Dearest mother, if you wish me to recover my health and strength, try to obtain for me the habit of the Sisters of Penance. I am convinced that God and St. Dominic, who call me, will take me from you if I wear any other habit."

Lapa gave way to her sorrow on hearing these words, but, fearing to lose her daughter, she appeared again before the Sisters, and pleaded so earnestly for her child that they began to waver in their judgment, saying: "If she is not attractive or of remarkable beauty, we will receive her on your account and hers; but if otherwise, we are bound to avoid the censure that might spring from the malice of men at the present time."

Lapa invited them to come and judge for themselves. Three or four of the most prudent and intelligent of

the Sisters returned with her to see Catharine and examine her. That her beauty was not remarkable was quite evident, for the eruption accompanying the disease had left her face quite disfigured. But when they conversed with her they discovered the great wisdom and the fervid virtue that so exceptionally marked Catharine, albeit young in years, as rich in the treasures of divine grace.

Deeply edified they returned to their associates, and rendered so joyful an account of their visit that, after due consultation with the Director of the Order, Catharine was unanimously accepted. They informed her mother that, as soon as Catharine had recovered from her illness, she should present herself at the church of the Friar Preachers, where she would be invested with the habit in the presence of the Brethren and Sisters.

When Catharine heard this happy news, she gave thanks, with tears of joy, to the heavenly Father, and to St. Dominic, who at last had fulfilled his promise; and in her fervor she asked that her health might be restored soon, so that all the more quickly her heart's wish might be accomplished. Her divine Spouse heard her prayer, for in a few days she recovered.

Still the mother clung to her faint hope, and made an effort to retard Catharine's reception; but in vain; and finally, yielding to her urgent solicitations, she accompanied her to the appointed church, where, amidst the quiet rejoicings of her future Sisters and the calm direction of the Dominican Fathers, Catharine was solemnly invested with the habit of the Order of the Sisters of Penance of St. Dominic—emblematic, in its

white and black draperies, of innocence and humility, and therefore peculiarly suitable to the beautiful character of the young postulant. Catharine was the first virgin to be received among the Sisters of Penance, in Siena. But by her example and influence many more were led to serve the Lord in all the innocence and purity of their virginity.

CHAPTER VII.

ORIGIN OF THE ORDER OF THE SISTERS OF PENANCE OF ST. DOMINIC, AND THEIR RULES.

The community of the Sisters of Penance was the natural outgrowth of another Order founded by St. Dominic, that illustrious saint who had battled like an avenging spirit against the rampant heresies that like weeds had sprung up from the decaying morals and abandoned faith of a degenerate, ungrateful people. He so vanquished the enemy of mankind, so purified with the flame of divine grace within him the insidious infection upon which they had flourished, so thoroughly sowed broadcast new seeds of the flowers of Truth and Faith, which had died from neglect, that it is recorded that, in a part of Italy alone, he saved from destruction more than a hundred thousand souls.

It was while engaged in stamping out the grievous errors that had sapped the roots of Catholic faith to such an extent that violent hands had torn away and retained the benefices that had sustained the Church and priesthood, thereby depriving of both spiritual consolation and practical relief the poor and destitute, that St. Dominic resolved to restore to the Church her ancient rights and privileges. To this end, with the assistance of several zealous godly men, he founded

the Order of the Brethren of the Militia of Jesus Christ; the primary objects of which were, first, to recover the property rightfully belonging to the Church; second, to defend it; and third, to withstand any injustice from the heretics. The members took a solemn vow to use every effort for the accomplishment of these ends, even to the sacrifice of both fortune and life. In order to prevent any interference in their work, St. Dominic obtained from the wives of such members as were married, a promise to assist their husbands to their utmost.

In order that they might be distinguished by their dress, he prescribed that the garments of both men and women, irrespective of shape, were to be black and white, as emblematic of humility and innocence; they were to assist at the Divine office, and when unable to do so he assigned to them the recitation of a certain number of Paters and Aves.

So powerful and far-reaching were the doctrines, so irresistible and convincing the miracles, so self-sacrificing and devoted the labors of this inspired saint that, assisted by the Order his wisdom had founded, heresy was almost banished from the land, and the Church of God resumed once more its sway.

The objects for which the Order of the Brethren of the Militia of Jesus Christ had been founded having been attained, and the Church secure again in all her rights, it soon lost, with its external usefulness, its distinctive title of "Militia." But, recognizing that the enemy who had brought about the evil that they had overcome would still attempt to find a lurking-place in

their souls and bring about their fall, and, at the same time, remembering the life of their inspired founder, they assumed the name and duties of the "Brothers of Penance of St. Dominic."

They continued thus their and his labors in the vineyard of Christ, watching, working, and praying. And, when those of them who were married were called to their reward, their widows took up their lifework and carried it on alone, calling themselves the "Sisters of Penance of St. Dominic." Other widows, who declined a second marriage and wished to devote the rest of their lives to God's service, adopted their name, being directed by the Friar Preachers, the original Order founded by St. Dominic, whose rules, modified for them, they adopted. These rules had been preserved in writing by Fr. Munic, a saintly man, who at one time directed the whole Order; and they are still in existence. The modification consisted solely in not exacting the three Vows, but otherwise did not differ in severity.

Thus securely grounded in the wisdom of St. Dominic, the Sisters of Penance increased so rapidly in sanctity and numbers as to become recipients of special consideration from the Sovereign Pontiff. Thus they were granted permission to hear the holy office in churches of the Friar Preachers even during the period interdicted; and when other Orders became the subject of restrictive measures from the Holy See, these were declared, by special decree, not to apply to the Order of the Sisters of Penance of St. Dominic, in whose austere rules there was nothing that needed change. And it stands now, as it did centuries ago, in all its in-

tegrity and sanctity, an everlasting monument of God's love for the Church and the glorious St. Dominic. To-day the Order exists not alone in convents but in the world, is flourishing while silently gathering under the protecting folds of its mantle a "multitudinous army of childlike saints," men and women, who, while performing the daily tasks assigned to them in the outside world, subject to all the distractions, temptations, and trials of a struggle for existence, yet find time to water with silent tears of sorrow, repentance, and hope the beautiful flowers of God's love, ever blossoming in the garden of their souls. To be in the world, but not of it; a creature of earth, but a child of God—this is what the Third Order of St. Dominic ever holds out to those seeking the light that leads to His love, and the strength to follow it. Without neglecting any of the duties of their station in life, to be able to participate in the thousands of petitions constantly arising to the throne of mercy, to let flow freely the pent-up springs of admiration, gratitude, and love to the divine Master, in unison with a multitude of others, and gradually to be so penetrated by the Holy Spirit that all earth's cares and burdens loosen and fall away; to be ever in the presence of God, is not merely a privilege, but a duty.

CHAPTER VIII.

CATHARINE'S ADVANCE IN THE GRACE OF GOD. DIVINE INSTRUCTION CONCERNING HER VISIONS.

In accordance with the rules of this Order of St. Dominic whose habit she now wore, Catharine did not pronounce the three vows of religion, but secretly resolved to observe them faithfully. She had already taken the vow of virginity, and the vow of poverty offered no difficulty to her whose whole life had been one of voluntary deprivation and penance. Although at her father's house, where she still occupied her solitary cell, there was plenty, she made use of it, with the free permission given by her father, only to relieve the needs of the poor. She often expressed the sorrow it gave her that her family had not been poor, so much so that she earnestly prayed to God for this gift, saying: "Lord, is it not better that I ask for my parents and brothers the goods of eternity? I know that earthly possessions are accompanied with evils and dangers, and I wish that they might not be exposed to them." This prayer was granted: it was not long before her parents were reduced to poverty, without apparent fault on their part. So absolute was her submission to the rules of the community, and to the orders of the

Prioress and Director of the Sisters of Penance, that she declared on her deathbed that she could not remember having ever once failed in obedience.

Catharine endeavored in every way possible to render secure the perfection to which she aspired. By retiring more and more from the busy world around her; by remaining in her cell when not at church; by maintaining a rigorous silence, which continued for three years, except when at confession; by her fasting, tears, and discipline, which she never remitted, she sought to unite herself more closely with the divine Spouse she had chosen. She arranged to take her short repose after the Fathers had been awakened for matins, saying: "Lord, my brethren who serve Thee have slept till now, and I have watched for them in Thy presence, that Thou mightest preserve them from evil and the wiles of the enemy. They arise now to praise Thee; protect them, and permit me to take a short repose;" and, retiring to her cell, she sought her couch of boards and her pillow of wood. And the divine Spouse to whom she had given herself so completely did not suffer her devotion to remain unrecognized or unrewarded, but bestowed on her His greatest gift. He appeared to her in the narrow little cell, and taught her how to live for Him and how to love Him.

At first these visions troubled her greatly, as she feared that they might be a deception of Satan, more especially when they were so apparent to her external senses. Reading in the heart of His faithful one the cause of this doubt, the Lord appeared to her in one of them, saying: "'Blessed is the man that liveth in fear'

(Prov. xxviii. 14). Daughter, if thou wouldst know how to discern My visions from the vaporings with which Satan fills the mind of men, listen : A certain terror fills the heart when I manifest Myself or My will; but as the soul receives the light of grace it diffuses peace throughout the mind. Their approach is always attended by bitterness, aroused by the sense of utter unworthiness of the subject; but this gradually changes into sweetness as the light of love penetrates them. While, in the phantasms that the evil one presents, he steals upon the senses, and, lulling them with pleasing pictures, he gives a fleeting joy, that terminates in plunging into grief and darkness the soul he seeks thereby to make his own. The way of My commandments, and a life of penance, at first appear hard and painful, but as the soul advances in perfection they become a sweet and lasting joy. The way of evil, on the contrary, at first seems agreeable and safe; but trouble and danger soon make their appearance. I will give thee another and infallible sign: I am the Truth; my visions consequently communicate truth to the soul; and as what is most necessary to one in the truth is to know Me, and to know one's self, this double recognition must lead one to despise himself and to honor Me. My visions render the soul humble by giving it the grace of comprehending the reality of its unworthiness. But, as the devil is the father of falsehood and the prince of pride, he can only give of what he possesses; his visions always engender in the soul a peculiar self-esteem which excites it to vanity. Examine thyself with care, and see whether thy visions proceed from the truth or

falsehood; truth excites humility, falsehood creates pride." From that moment her heavenly visions and communications were constant, and blessed her work.

As an instance of the verity of these marvellous manifestations of the divine presence and their effects, it is related that Catharine's confessor being in doubt, in the face of such astounding things as were told him concerning her, whether these phenomena were of divine origin or the device of Satan, who delights to work on credulous female minds especially, and desiring to be enlightened by Him who can neither deceive nor be deceived, he requested Catharine to ask for him an extraordinary contrition for his sins, such as he had never experienced before. He felt that should this be granted to him it would demonstrate beyond any doubt the presence of the Holy Spirit; for, as Fr. Raymond says, be we worthy of mercy or punishment, true contrition of heart is a sure sign that we are in the grace of God. Without telling her of his doubts or object, he asked her to obtain for him from God the remission of his sins, adding that, in order to satisfy himself that this had been granted, he must also have an extraordinary contrition for them. On the following day, while conversing with Catharine on the ingratitude of mankind, and God's mercy, he had suddenly a vision of all his sins with surprising accuracy and distinction; he saw himself standing before the great judgment-seat full of fear and sorrow and shame, and meriting death, but receiving instead, from the merciful Judge, hope and joy and glory and life eternal. And, overcome by the vision, he sank to the floor, borne down by the weight of sor-

row and repentance. Catharine remained silent while his tears flowed; until he, in his surprise at what had taken place within him, and remembering his request of the day previous, turned to her, saying: "Is this not the gift I asked for yesterday?" She answered: "The same"; and rising, she touched him lightly on the shoulder, saying: "Remember the grace of God."

It was not long after that the same confessor was called to see Catharine, who was unable to leave her cell on account of illness, yet desired to discuss with him some revelations she had received. Despite the fever that was consuming her, she began at once to speak of God and of His revelations that day to her. These revelations were so extraordinary that, forgetting his previous experience, he said to himself: "Must I believe what she says?" And even while he hesitated her countenance suddenly changed to that of a stern man gazing fixedly at him, filling him with an unknown terror, for it bore the impress of the majesty of the presence of God; and closing his eyes he cried out in his fear: "Oh, who looks at me thus?" He seemed to hear Catharine answer: "He that is." He turned to look at her again, all his doubts dispelled. The vision had disappeared.

CHAPTER IX.

DOCTRINES TAUGHT CATHARINE BY OUR LORD. HER ADOPTION OF THEM AS LIFE-RULES.

It is not so difficult to understand the sublime spiritual perfection attained by Catharine when we consider, first, the bulwark that she had erected in her soul by her solitude, fasting, prayers, and discipline against the temptations of the world and the weaknesses of the flesh; and second, its absolute impregnability against all assaults, in that its sole Occupant, Defender, Guide, and Master was the Blessed Saviour.

It was while she was meditating on the glory of this presence in these visions that Our Lord appeared to her, saying: "Know, my daughter, what thou art and what I am: if thou learnest these two things perfectly, thou shalt be truly blessed. Thou art she who is not, and I am He who am; let thy soul be once penetrated with this truth, and thou art safe from the snares and deceptions of the enemy; then wilt thou never consent to transgress any of My commandments, and thou wilt acquire without difficulty grace, truth, and peace."

At another time when He appeared to her, He consoled her with these exquisite words of divine love: "Daughter, think of Me; if thou dost, I will always think of thee." And joyously obeying the admonish-

ing words, she endeavored to banish all thoughts from her heart that could distract her from hearing the ever-present voice of God, who is infinitely wise and omnipotent, and will protect and guide those who meditate on Him and have recourse to Him at all times. And thinking of His saving words of love, she would check our apprehension at all times by saying: "Why so solicitous for yourselves? Let Providence act; amid your greatest dangers its eyes are fixed on you, and it will ever save you." What an epitome of faith, of knowledge, and of love is contained in these few words; what a source of infinite consolation, peace, and content!

That Catharine made continual application of these divine truths is demonstrated by an incident that occurred when on board a ship. The pilot was navigating a dangerous channel, when gradually the wind fell to a dead calm, leaving the vessel at the mercy of dangerous currents or possible adverse winds. When told of the danger, Catharine replied calmly: "Why do you trouble so much about yourselves?" But the adverse wind dreaded having sprung up shortly after, and Catharine being informed of it, she answered: "Let him change the helm, in the name of God, and sail in the direction of the wind that Heaven will send." The pilot obeyed, while Catharine's head was bent in silent prayer; presently a favorable wind arose, and carried them safely into the desired port.

This demonstrates the doctrines to which she held: "that if a soul recognizes that it is nothing in itself, and that it exists solely because of God, it will not rely

on itself in any action, but will confide in God alone, putting all its trust in Him." This, far from rendering it incapable of independent action, increases it enormously; as in calling to its aid the love of God's providence and wisdom it relies on these to provide against possible future events; while it is thus released from its burden of unknown fear, and left in tranquil receptivity to guide present action. "The soul that truly loves the Creator finishes by no longer perceiving itself, and forgetting itself together with all creatures," she says; and, in explanation, continues: "The soul that comprehends its nothingness and knows that all its happiness is in its Creator abandons itself so perfectly, and plunges itself so totally in God, that all its activity is directed towards Him and exercised in Him. It is unwilling to come forth from the centre in which it has found the perfection of happiness; and that union of love which daily augments in it, transforms it so completely, as it were, into God, that it can have no other thoughts or desires or other love than love of Him; neither has it memory of aught else." The love of God implies a hatred of sin; and where the soul, in its struggle to unite perfectly with God, finds that it is trammelled and held back by the external senses, which foster the germs of sin, it seeks by long and continued efforts to bring these senses into subjection to the soul and to God so as to render harmless and finally destroy all vestige of evil. "O eternal providence of God," exclaims Catharine, "what hast thou not done! From faults spring virtue; from feebleness, strength; from offence, pardon; and in contempt love is found. Oh,

then, my children, have that holy hatred of self; it will render you humble; it will give you patience in tribulation, moderation in prosperity, restraint in your deportment, and you will become agreeable to God and to man. Woe, woe to the soul which has not this holy hatred of self! for where it does not exist, self-love must reign; and self-love is the cause of all sin, and the source of all vices."

There can be no doubt that these doctrines were so founded in the wisdom of God as to have evidently emanated from Him directly; and Catharine could well exclaim with the apostle: "I glory in my weakness, in order that the power of Christ may dwell in me."

CHAPTER X.

CATHARINE'S GREAT VICTORIES OVER TEMPTATION. HER WONDERFUL INTIMACY WITH GOD.

CATHARINE, who had, notwithstanding her youth, attained a very high degree of perfection and had resisted all the attacks of Satan, was now to be again submitted to trial and persecution at the hands of the prince of darkness. Foreseeing the envious malice of the evil one, God, in His mercy, inspired her to seek from Him the gift of fortitude; which, after several days of continuous prayer, He granted to her in this wise, saying: "Daughter, if thou wilt acquire fortitude, imitate Me. I could easily arrest the efforts Satan will make, or adopt some other means of overcoming them; but I am desirous of instructing thee by My example, and teaching thee to triumph by the way of the cross. If thou wishest to become powerful against thy enemies, take the cross for thy safeguard. Hath not the Apostle told thee that I went joyfully to the cruel and ignominious death on Mt. Calvary? Choose, then, to have trials and afflictions, and not only endure them with patience, but embrace them with delight; they are veritable treasures, for the more thou wilt suffer for Me the more thou wilt resemble Me, and the more shalt thou gain of My grace and glory.

Regard, therefore, on My account, My beloved child, bitter things as sweet, and sweet things as bitter, and thou shalt be certain of strength." It was the deep impression made on Catharine by this lesson from her divine Spouse that caused her to regard her pains and afflictions with so much joy and consolation, as they brought her into a closer relationship and knowledge of God.

Prepared thus by divine instruction, Catharine was fully armed against the assaults of the demon, who was permitted to let loose his legions on this pure white soul, and try to drag her down from the pinnacle of perfection. So, attacking that which was most precious to her, and the loss of which would render her an easier victim, they presented to her imagination the most degrading temptations; they whispered in her ears the most abominable suggestions; they represented to her eyes the most exciting phantoms; they lashed her blood into a fury, till the poor, struggling, valiant girl, driven almost to despair, courageously drew the iron chain around her body, causing the red blood to flow that her soul might remain the whiter.

When these blackest of demons retired vanquished, others took their place, giving her no peace. Then assuming the forms of people, hoping thereby to break down more easily the barriers her austerities and prayers had erected, they came to her, saying: "Why, little one, do you torture yourself this way, uselessly? Do you believe that you will be able to continue? Will it not kill your body, and therefore render you guilty of suicide? Cease this folly; you are young and should

enjoy the world while enjoyment is possible to you. You can please God as well by some mode of life less severe." But, deaf to all their importunities, Catharine repulsed them with these words: "I trust in Our Lord Jesus Christ and not in myself."

Again the demons retired. Then laying aside his imps of subtle reasonings and specious words, Satan let loose on her a foul screaming crew, who danced around her, inviting her to take part in their hideous abominations. Afflicted beyond measure at her inability to dispel the infernal suggestions and images by closing her eyes and ears, and plunged into a profound melancholy at the absence of her Lord and Master at a time when she needed Him most, yet she never ceased for a moment her austerities, but increased them, and, depriving herself of all sleep, gave up her heart to prayer. And remembering the teaching of her Spouse, she would say to herself: "O thou vilest of creatures, art thou worthy of consolation? Dost thou not remember thy sins? Wilt thou hold thyself in great estimation, miserable one? It will be a great deal if thou avoidest eternal damnation in bearing all thy life these trials and miseries. Why then be discouraged and saddened? If thou dost escape hell, Jesus Christ knows well how to console thee for all eternity; it is not to enjoy now soft pleasures that thou didst resolve to serve Him, but to possess Him in heaven. Arise, then, abandon none of thy pious practices, and celebrate more than ever the praises of thy Creator." Thus she fought the enemy of God. As her solitary cell seemed to be infested with

these impure spirits, she remained as long as possible in church, being less tormented by them when there.

For several days the battle continued. But when returning one day from church, with her heart full of prayer, the light of the Holy Spirit shone in on her soul, and she instantly saw the reason of these terrible temptations. She had asked of God the gift of fortitude, and they were the appointed means by which she could obtain it. So when one malicious devil whispered to her: "Poor miserable soul, what art thou about to undertake? Thou canst not pass thy whole life thus; we will torment thee to death unless thou dost yield to us," Catharine, summoning to her aid all the fortitude the struggle had given her, hurled at them her defiance thus: "I have chosen sufferings for my consolation; it will be not only not difficult, but even sweet, to bear similar and greater afflictions for the love of my Saviour and as long as He wills.

Then fleeing back in direst confusion to their foul master at the name and love of Jesus, they left the soul of Catharine to peace and to her holy Spouse, who, descending in a flood of light, appeared to her as He was when hanging on the cross. "Catharine, my daughter," He said, "see how I have suffered for thee, and it will not be painful for thee to suffer for Me."

The suffering form and features of the Blessed Redeemer vanished, only to be replaced by the loved lineaments she had so often beheld. And He spoke to her of the victory that she had just won; then she said: "Lord, where wast Thou when my heart was so tormented with impurities?" And He answered: "I

was in thy heart." "Ah! Master, Thou art truth itself, and I humbly bow before Thy majesty; but how is it that Thou wast in my heart when it was filled with such detestable thoughts?" "Did these thoughts and temptations give thee pleasure or pain?" He asked; and showing in her face the truth of her words, she answered: "No, Lord, not pleasure, but excessive pain and sadness." "Thou wast sad and suffering," said the Lord, "because I was hidden in the depths of thy heart. Had I been absent, these thoughts would have penetrated thy heart, and filled thee with joy; but My presence rendered them insupportable to thee; and because thou didst hold them in horror thou didst fight against them, and not at once succeeding thou wast weighed down with sorrow. It was I that occupied thy heart and soul, and held the enemy at bay, permitting him to go only so far, that thou mightst acquire strength and courage; and I it was who flooded thy heart and soul with the light of My love, and banished to the black depths the imp of hell. And because thou hast accepted these trials with thy whole heart, I have delivered thee from them. I created thee in My image and likeness; and if thou wilt offer no obstacle to My grace so shalt thou remain, undisfigured by sin; and the memory of what My mortal life was will remain in thy soul to support thy weakness and prevent thy fall. By virtue of My presence hast thou fought and won. Let thy soul rejoice, Catharine, My daughter, for I will come to thee again."

The vision faded, leaving Catharine's heart overflowing with the lingering sweetness of His presence, and

her ears ringing with the exquisitely tender words "Catharine, My daughter."

Thenceforth, as He had promised, Our Lord visited Catharine with a frequency that would seem incredible if her previous life and character were unknown. To the faithful hearts that have experienced the infinite goodness of God those scenes are not doubtful; for through their eyes of purity they see God.

During these visits He would sometimes be accompanied by the holy Mother, sometimes by St. Dominic, occasionally by both of them. At other times St. Mary Magdalen, St. John the Evangelist, St. Paul, and other saints would appear with Him alone, or all together. He came more frequently alone.

It was thus He bestowed on her the gifts of learning, and taught her wisdom. An instance of this is seen in the following fact. Catharine had never learned to read; and desiring greatly to recite the Office of the Order, she began to study the alphabet with the aid of a companion. After several weeks of great effort, having made but little progress, it occurred to her that she might obtain from Heaven the grace to learn rapidly, and thereby lose less time. Lifting up to God the voice that was ever raised in joyful trust, she said: "Lord, if it be pleasing to Thee that I should know how to read, have the goodness to teach me what I cannot learn alone, in order that I may be enabled to recite the Office and sing Thy praise. If not, Thy will be done; I will remain in my ignorance, employing joyfully the time Thou givest me, in meditation." Scarcely had she finished her supplication, when

the divine light illumined her senses and bestowed the desired gift. At once she could read rapidly and without difficulty. What makes the supernatural source of her faculty evident was her utter inability to spell the words or even name the letters. She at once procured the necessary books of the Office, and copies of the Psalms, of which the Office is largely composed. Her favorite chant commenced thus: "Deus in adjutorium meum intende"—"Incline unto my aid, O God."

CHAPTER XI.

CATHARINE'S ESPOUSAL TO OUR LORD, AND THE MIRACULOUS RING GIVEN HER.

As the grace of Our Lord was thus daily lavished on His chosen one, on "Catharine, His daughter," it aroused within her a desire to become so perfect in faith and fortitude that nothing could ever come between her and the one object of all her aspirations, Jesus Christ, her Spouse. Devoting all her energies to that end, she pleaded that God would so strengthen her faith as to make it invulnerable. Each time He made the same answer: "I will espouse thee in faith."

The holy season of Lent drawing near, and the world being busy celebrating the Carnival, Catharine retired to her cell to fast and pray. Again the all-absorbing desire of her heart found voice, and this time not in vain; for the Lord answered her: "Because thou hast shunned the vanities and pleasures of the world, and hast fixed on Me alone all the desire of thy heart, I intend, while thy family are rejoicing in worldly feasts and festivals, to celebrate the espousal which will unite Me to thy soul." As He spoke, there appeared His blessed Mother with St. John the Evangelist, the Apostle St. Paul, St. Dominic, the founder of her Order, and with them the Royal

Psalmist, David, from whose harp arose strains of heavenly music. Then the holy Mother of God, taking the right hand of Catharine, presented it to her Son, asking Him to deign to espouse her in faith who had been all her life devoted to Him. With the majesty of divine love shining in His face, He accepted the hand. Placing on her finger a ring of gold set with five precious stones, the centre one a splendid diamond of purest brilliancy, He said: "Catharine, I, thy Creator and Redeemer, espouse thee in faith; preserve it pure until we celebrate together in heaven the eternal nuptials of the Lamb; act courageously and without fear, and accomplish the work that My providence will confide to thee. Thou art armed with faith; thou shalt triumph over all thy enemies." The vision disappeared; but on her hand blazed the magnificent emblem of espousal, visible only to her eyes, to remind her of the glorious inseparable union to which she had been admitted.

Earnest consideration of this miraculous ceremony reveals to us clearly its intent and purpose. It was without doubt intended to confirm in Catharine the divine grace accorded her; and as it concerned only herself, so the ring, the constant reminder of the pledge, was seen by her alone. It has been remarked that God often vouchsafes to assure His chosen servants of their future perseverance in His love and grace. This is because of the corrupt surroundings in which such a chosen one must often work in bringing back to God the souls He has redeemed with His precious blood.

Catharine, though a woman, was destined for this

immortal crown, and therefore a peculiar grace was bestowed on her with a permanent token, because the weakness of her sex, the difficulty of her mission, and the perversity of the times required that she should be continually and visibly sustained. Amid the multitude of shipwrecks of life from which she rescued many perishing souls, the miraculous ring never left her hand, nor the grace of God her heart.

CHAPTER XII.

CATHARINE'S LIFEWORK INDICATED TO HER BY OUR LORD.

The wisdom of divine Providence is shown in all His works. Though we are able to see but one step at a time in the progress of His will, yet when the complete result, with all the intricacy of its composition, is revealed to us, we can but humbly bow our heads and say: "O Lord, how admirable is Thy name in the whole earth!"

Step by step Catharine had been led along the path of virtue by the guiding hand of God. Exercise in combat and struggle against the enemy, had given her fortitude; prayer and meditation had obtained for her grace, and God's purpose was to be revealed. She heard a voice within her saying: "Open to Me by thy zeal the portal of souls, that I may enter and abide therein; open to My sheep that have strayed, a way to the pasture. Bring to the faithful the treasures of My truth and the jewels of My grace. Open to Me all hearts, O thou My child, My friend, My dove, My immaculate chosen one." In obedience to the call Catharine's lifework began, though it was not without sorrow at first that she gave up her solitude to mingle more among those she was destined to save.

She was not, however, deprived of the heavenly communications that had guided her in the past; on the contrary, they were increased. She learned from the Blessed Saviour of the work for which He had prepared her. In the beginning He said to her after a short visit: "Go quickly; this is the hour of repast. Go, take thy place at the table with thy parents for a while; then thou wilt return to Me." Sobbing bitterly, Catharine replied: "Alas! my beloved Spouse, why dost Thou drive me from Thy presence? If I have offended Thy majesty, behold my wretched body; punish it immediately. I will cheerfully accept all; but spare me the grief of being separated from Thee even for one instant, O my Beloved! What shall I do at table? Thou knowest that I partake of a food that those whom Thou commandest me to seek know not. Is it in bread only that man finds strength? Do not the words that issue from thy mouth better impart life to the soul of the pilgrim? Thou knowest that I fled the society of creatures to find Thee, my Lord and my God. Now that I have obtained mercy and Thy grace notwithstanding my unworthiness, must I resign this inestimable treasure to mingle anew in worldly affairs, to fall again into my former ignorance, and perchance become odious to Thee? Ah, no, no! Thy infinite goodness will never command anything which can separate the soul from Thee." Thus she pleaded at Our Lord's feet. Then the tender Saviour quieted her in this manner: "Peace, my daughter, calm thyself. It is far from My wish to part from thee; nay, I wish thee to unite thyself more closely

to Me by having thee fulfil the second of My great commandments, 'Love thy neighbor.' Only thus canst thou obey the first, for My love includes both. In thy youth, ardent in zeal for the salvation of souls, that My love had implanted in thee, thou wouldst fain have assumed the garb of a Friar Preacher, the better to labor for Me. Therefore do not complain if I lead thee to the highway for which thou didst implore the habit of St. Dominic My beloved servant." Catharine could only whisper in her heart: "Not my will, but Thine be done, O Lord. I am only darkness and ignorance; and Thou art all light and the wisdom of the Father."

Strengthened in her love, and enlightened in her understanding, Catharine humbly asked how, being a woman, this could be accomplished.

"With God all things are possible," said the Lord. "I know it is humility, and not disobedience, that prompts thy words; know then, My child, that pride has so filled the hearts of men, especially those considering themselves learned and wise, that My outraged justice is about to confound them first, in order that, like the Jews of old, they may humble themselves before the wisdom I have given My lowly servant. Yea, I will send a woman weak and ignorant by nature, but wise and powerful through My grace, to confound their arrogance. If they will humbly admit their folly, and avail themselves of the instructions I send them by this frail messenger, My mercy shall not fail them. But should they reject and contemn this salutary disgrace, then will I so humiliate them that every one shall

scoff at them. Thus will I chastise their pride; the more they seek to exalt themselves, the lower will I abase them even beneath themselves. Delay not, My daughter, to obey Me; go out into the highways and byways of the world with My mantle and My cross. Fear not, for I am ever with thee."

Kissing her divine Master's feet, Catharine went forth.

CHAPTER XIII.

WONDERFUL OCCURRENCES AT THE BEGINNING OF HER MISSION. HER INEXHAUSTIBLE CHARITY.

CATHARINE, obedient to the direction of her divine Spouse, resolved to live so as to render herself most useful to her neighbor, and, by devoting herself to practices of humility and works of charity, to influence him for good. She voluntarily performed the menial services of her father's house, such as sweeping and washing and cooking, and attending on such as were sick. All this she did without relinquishing any of her prayers, austerities, or penances. It is not by the position of the body or the motion of the lips that a soul is united to God, but by the earnest yearning of the spirit, the silent prayer in the heart. So it was with Catharine.

Another gateway to God's love, that of charity, having been opened to her, Catharine hastened to be admitted. Having nothing of her own to give, she besought her father to allow her to use her own discretion in deducting, from the abundance God has given them, the share of the poor. To this her father consented, for he saw clearly the loving hand of his Maker shown in the works of His child. "Let no one," he said to his family, "prevent my child from giving alms. I have

given her liberty to dispose of anything we possess." The doors thus opened, Catharine at once used her liberty to enter, and scatter in the fields beyond the seeds of the love she had received from God.

Not without discernment did she labor thus. No sooner did she recognize actual want, than she supplied relief even before it was solicited. Being acquainted with some very poor families who were ashamed to beg, she would rise early in the morning to carry them corn and oil and wine and other necessaries. Going alone to these houses, the doors of which often seemed to open miraculously for her, she would leave her offering inside and silently glide away.

Falling sick one day, and unable to rise from her bed through suffering, she learned of the destitution of a widow in the neighborhood who sorely needed a loaf of bread for her little ones. Sick at heart at the thought, Catharine asked her Spouse to give her strength enough to go to the unhappy woman's relief. Even before dawn she arose, sought some provisions, with a sack of meal and a flask of wine, also a jug of oil, Carrying these to her cell, she found that it would be impossible to carry all at once. But again was strength given when asked earnestly, and she fulfilled her errand without difficulty.

One day while she was in the church of the Friar Preachers of Siena a poor man solicited from her alms "for the love of God." Having nothing with her at the time, she begged the poor fellow to accompany her to the house, where she would relieve his want. He answered: "If you have anything to give, let

me have it now, for I cannot wait." Afflicted by his apparent distress, and seeking some means of relieving it, her eyes suddenly fell on the little silver cross she wore attached to a knotted cord on which the Lord's Prayer is recited. Breaking the cord instantly, Catharine gave the little cross to the beggar, who accepted it joyfully, departing at once as though he had come for that alone. The following night, while Catharine was deeply absorbed in prayer, the Blessed Saviour appeared to her, and in His hand she saw her little silver cross, but now all encrusted with precious jewels. "Daughter," said He, "dost thou recognize this cross?" "Yes, Master, but it is more beautiful than when it was mine." "Yesterday, in the strength of thy love, thou didst make an offering of it to Me. It is that love which sparkles in these jewels. I promise thee now that I will return it to thee on the last day such as it is now, and in the presence of all men and the blessed, and at that last solemn moment, when the mercy and justice of the Father shall be made manifest through Me, I will not forget what thou hast done for Me."

At another time, when Catharine was alone with one companion in the chapel of the Sisters, the rest having departed after the Office was finished, there appeared before her a young man, very thinly clad, who implored her in God's name to give him some clothing. In the ardor of her charity she thought only of means of supplying his need. Retiring for a moment with the Sister, she returned with part of her woollen habit, which she gave joyfully to the young man. Apparently

not satisfied, he importuned her thus: "Madam, you have given me a woollen garment; but cannot you give me some linen also?" "Yes; follow me," replied Catharine, "and I will make you contented." Arriving at the house, Catharine hastened to where some family linen was kept, and taking two garments she brought them to him. "It is not enough," he said; "these will not cover me sufficiently." Again she sought through the house, and by cutting up other articles, tried to furnish him enough. But her patience and charity were to be further tested, for, after thanking Catharine in the name of Him for whom she had given, he continued: "You have clothed me, madam, but I have a companion who is in as great need as myself. Cannot you spare him also some clothing?" Nothing daunted by these excessive demands, but only grieved by her inability to accede to them, inasmuch as everything was kept locked from her by her family, else she would have left them nothing, Catharine began at once to consider what portion of her own scanty garb she would give him. As she had left herself only sufficient for absolute need, and had nothing at hand to replace it, she turned to him greatly distressed, saying: "My friend, if it were possible for me, I would give you this dress, but, as I cannot, I beg you do not take offence. I would gladly give you all you ask, if I could." With a smile of infinite sweetness the poor man turned to go, saying: "Yes, I see that you give willingly whatever is possible. Farewell." By that smile and the ringing tenderness in the voice she thought that she recognized the Redeemer, who had visited her so often,

but humility banished this idea from her mind when she reflected how unworthy she was of another such inestimable favor.

In the silence of the following night, while Catharine was pouring out to her Spouse the love and adoration that ever flowed from her heart for Him, the darkness was suddenly illumined by His presence in the figure of the destitute young man of the previous day. In his hand were the very garments she had given so gladly, but all transformed by jewels and fine gold! "Daughter Mine," said the Beloved, "knowest thou these garments?" She meekly answered: "Yes, my Father." Coming nearer He said: "They were but of ordinary material, but thy charity has made them of spun gold; from thy nakedness thou fain wouldst have clothed Me. Now will I bestow on thee from Mine own body a garment that will ever protect thy body from cold, and thy soul from danger, visible alone to thee and to Me." Drawing, apparently from the wound in His side, a vestment of the purple hue of His blood, he placed it on her, saying: "Catharine, precious, I invest thee with this protecting garment as a symbol and pledge of the glory that awaits thee in heaven." The vision vanished, leaving Catharine on her knees. From that moment she never suffered from exposure; a single light robe was all she ever afterward wore, even in the severest weather, such was the protection afforded by the invisible garment.

That Catharine merited these manifestations of divine pleasure is evident. Her almsgiving was secret

from the eyes of others, like those of St. Nicholas; she emulated the example of the holy St. Martin in rendering even her very garments for the poor. It was to encourage her to greater deeds, as well as to fit her for higher purposes, that the Saviour appeared so often to her, leaving perpetual pledges of His favor. It was thus also that He assured her of her future perseverance in His special work, revealed the secrets of her destiny, and the splendor of her reward.

Such revelations of the divine Presence are the most precious favors that can be bestowed by a loving Father, for they give to the soul the certainty of salvation, and therefore inexpressible joy and peace.

This surety of possessing heaven can only still further excite the practice of every virtue. Patience, humility, fortitude, form a fitting foundation on which may rest securely the noble gifts of faith, hope, and charity. To a soul thus fortified by the love of God all things, in His name, are easy, and the knowledge of its high destiny sustains it in all places and at all times.

Of this Catharine was a striking example. Continually being sustained by divine grace, her advancement in the field of charity was marked on every hand by remarkable incidents. Once, having learned that a certain person, who, for pure love of God, had divided his whole wealth among the poor, lay at the point of death from hunger, her heart was deeply touched with compassion. Quickly filling with eggs a small sack, that she habitually carried under her robe, she hastened to his relief. Having to pass the church on her way, she could not resist the opportunity of worshipping

Our Saviour in the Blessed Sacrament. She had intended to stop for a moment only, but the intense feeling of adoration and gratitude and love for Him who redeemed us at such a fearful price, overcame her completely. In an ecstasy of adoration she sank unconscious to the floor, the whole weight of her body resting on the sack of eggs, not one of which was injured, although a large metal thimble that happened to be in the same sack was broken. Thus was her act of charity sustained and completed.

The glory of the Saviour often shone through and perfected Catharine's charity by miraculous intervention. She never hesitated to freely use the permission given her in regard to supplying the poor from her own home. Having occasion often to give supplies of wine to the poor, Catharine, as was customary with her in all her gifts, sought the best, and, finding a full cask of very excellent wine that had not yet been used, distributed it freely to the needy. Ordinarily this cask would have supplied her own family, with economy, for about twenty days. Another cask that had been in use having become spoiled, recourse was had to this very one from which Catharine had already liberally dispensed large quantities. The quantity drawn for the daily family needs was considerable. Notwithstanding this continuous drain from the two sources, the amount of wine in the cask suffered no diminution; and not only that, but its quality was so superior that it was remarked by all that they had never tasted any so good. This continuing for such a long time, it could not help being noticed by the family and domestics, who with

delight told Catharine's father of the apparently inexhaustible cask, that for so long had supplied their daily needs. Catharine alone understood the secret, and, rejoicing in the gift of the Benefactor, lavished on the poor what had been so bountifully provided. Weeks lengthened into months; still the wine continued to flow unchanged in quantity or quality. Finally, the vintage time arriving, the casks were brought out to be opened and cleansed for the reception of the new wine. The vintners coming to this cask endeavored to empty it of its contents so that it might be opened and prepared like the others. Many vessels were brought and filled from it, yet the flow, like the munificence of the Creator, continued unabated. At last the director of the vintage gave orders that that cask was to be emptied at once, and brought to be filled at the winepress. They answered that on the previous evening a large quantity of strong, clear wine had been drawn from it, and therefore it must still contain a considerable amount. Impatient at their apparent stupidity, he said: "Open the cask immediately, and take out what remains of the wine; we cannot wait any longer." Obedient to his command, the cask was opened. Dumb with astonishment, they found that the wood from which had flowed such an abundant supply of wine only the night previous, was found to be as dry and empty as though it had been idle a year.

As in all her deeds of charity she sought only to please the Master, so He sustained and blessed her work.

CHAPTER XIV.

WONDERS PERFORMED BY CATHARINE WHILE ATTENDING THE SICK.

CATHARINE'S chosen work of charity brought her into contact with and gave her an intimate knowledge of the many different necessities of the poor; her heart went out to all in compassion and sympathy, but for the sick and suffering she cherished a tender commiseration; and by the intense earnestness of the efforts she made to relieve them she was enabled to accomplish what was apparently incredible.

Among the many sick poor of Siena there was one woman named Tecca, who was compelled by extreme poverty to seek in the public hospital the medicines which she could not buy, and which were necessary for the relief of her sufferings, these being of an acute character, inasmuch as she was attacked with leprosy. The disease extended gradually until it covered nearly her entire body; the smell that arose from the dead and ulcerating portions of her flesh was so offensive as to be almost insupportable. No one could be found who was willing to take care of her, while the accommodations at the hospital were totally inadequate for the isolation and treatment of this terrible malady.

It was thought best for the sake of those living in

the hospital to remove this patient beyond the limits of the city. Then was displayed the grand courage and devoted charity of the saintly Catharine. No sooner did she hear of this sad case than she hastened to the hospital, sought the leper, embraced and kissed her, and not only promised to see that all her wants were supplied, but arranged to take sole care of her and the little cabin allotted to her as long as she might live. Nor was this promise rashly given, for she carried it out faithfully.

Twice a day, morning and evening, she visited her, attending to her wants and leaving necessary supplies. Catharine's devotion to this poor leper was not alone not irksome, but was a continual source of joy, for she contemplated the soul only, shining through the disease-laden flesh, and in that soul the reflection of her beloved Spouse was mirrored, to be loved even as He Himself is loved.

The exalted spirit of love that inspired Catharine to noble deeds in this work of charity excited in the heart of the leprous woman both pride and ingratitude. These are not unusual in persons of small mind who possess neither humility nor charity, and, moreover, they do not hesitate to exhibit them. So it was with the leper. The more solicitous and affectionate Catharine was in serving her, the worse became the arrogance and irritability of the wretched woman, who imagined because she received this tender care and attention they were only her due. When anything occurred contrary to her wish she would roundly abuse her benefactress. If Catharine happened to be late on account

of having prolonged her devotions beyond the usual hour, Tecca the leper would vent her ill-temper by saying, "Good-morning, my Lady, Queen of Fonte-Branda [this was the name of the section of the city in which Catharine resided], your majesty takes pleasure in staying all day long in the Church of the Friars: it is *there* you have wasted all this forenoon, I am sure, my fine lady. You can never see enough of those monks!"

Catharine, serene in the quiet consciousness of her own strength, but grieved at the other's weakness, would strive with compassionate humility and meekness to appease her, saying: "Dear friend, keep thy soul in peace, for the love of our blessed Lord. I am a little late, I know; but have patience and I will attend to all thy wants at once." Then quickly but quietly she would light the fire and prepare food for her irascible patient, who could not help being amazed at her energy and dispatch.

These scenes were of almost daily occurrence, and continued for a long period; but her patience and fortitude never once faltered, winning the admiration and respect of all. Lapa, her mother, alone found fault with her, saying: "My daughter, you will certainly take the leprosy from this woman; therefore I wish that you no longer attend on her." But with that confidence in her Creator born of her life of devotion to his beloved Son, she quieted her mother's fears by assuring her that, as the work she was doing had been confided to her by the Father, though He might try her, He would never abandon her. Her words seemed prophetic, for it was not long before it became evident

that Catharine had contracted the fearful disease. Her fingers and hands, which had come in contact with the loathsome ulcers of Tecca's body, first showed signs of the infection. The faithful servant of the Lord was to be severely tried. She wavered not an instant, but quietly, humbly continued her self-sacrificing charity, calm, strong, serene in the Master's will. She considered not what might happen to her body, but what she could win for her soul. Though the repulsive disease remained a long time, yet she so lifted herself out of it by the elevation of her soul to God, that she did not remark the pain or deformity it produced.

The loving Father, who in all the apparent trials and afflictions He sends us seeks only to render us worthy of His love and help, leading us to turn to Him alone, saw that the tranquil faith remained undimmed in the heart of His handmaid, and released her from her trust. Tecca died. Catharine, who consoled her in the last sad agony, carefully washed the frightfully distorted and diseased body, clothed it decently, and after reciting the prayers for the dead, buried it with her own hands, while the Brethren chanted, in the chapel near, at her request, the dirge for a departed soul.

Returning to her lonely cell, the last sad duty of her task performed, Catharine lifted up her voice in prayerful gratitude to God for His loving-kindness and watchful care, that had sustained her throughout this long and weary trial; for from Him had come all the graces necessary for the accomplishment of her act of charity, the humility to serve the miserable woman, the

patience to bear her ingratitude and arrogant ill-temper, the fortitude to resist disgust for the foul-smelling, loathsome disease, the charity that saw only a soul precious to her Master under all this foulness, and abiding faith that the Saviour had been with her through it all.

Yes, truly was he with her: He had not abandoned her. Slowly rising from her knees, with trembling heart and tearful eyes, she saw that the terrible pestilence had been lifted from her. Again her hands were clean.

It was tremendous events like this that rendered Catharine invulnerable against all the assaults of Satan. Like a linked armor, her faith, charity, and love of God were kept ever bright by continuous exercise. Her soul emerged from the flames of such contests, as the beaten gold does from the burnisher, with an added brightness and beauty. That others might see reflected in it the image of her heavenly Spouse, occasions were not infrequent when it was revealed thus in all its simple purity.

It was not long after the death of Tecca, that Catharine, who was still devoting most of her time to caring for the sick poor, was told of the illness of one of the Sisters of Penance of St. Dominic, who was well known on account of having publicly consecrated her life and her wealth to the cause of charity and mercy. Her name was Palmerina. Curiously enough, she had conceived a deep-rooted hatred for Catharine, no doubt due to some remnant of the pride that had actuated her in making public her renunciation of the world, to-

gether with the machinations of the evil one, who, finding a little fertile ground in this still weak soul, sowed in it some of the poisonous seeds of envy. She disliked meeting Catharine, and was angered when her name was mentioned. So blinded was she by her hatred, that she denounced her in public with calumny and execration.

In vain Catharine sought by humility, meekness, and patience to overcome the unreasonable hatred of Sister Palmerina, who viewed all of Catharine's advances with eyes of jealous dislike, and rejected them with contempt. With a sad heart, thinking the fault to be her own, Catharine turned to her divine Spouse, that inexhaustible fountain of wisdom and compassion, for consolation and guidance for herself, and mercy for her erring Sister.

But mercy being attendant on justice could not precede it, so God in His wisdom first gave this unhappy Sister the opportunity of uprooting the evil weeds of envy and malice and hatred, that under the watchful care of the Enemy were springing up in her soul. He afflicted her body so that she might be chastised into obedience and humility, and softened by the sweet charity of His servant Catharine.

Unhappily for Palmerina, so well and deep had she allowed the tempter to plant his insidious germs now running riot in her soul, that they choked every good impulse struggling there. Ignoring the warning that the illness gave her of the danger to her soul, she rejected with scorn all the advances made by Catharine,

who frequently offered her assistance and sought in every way to soften and remove her blind resentment.

Catharine's very eagerness to console her by affection, attention, and service seemed only to arouse and stimulate Sister Palmerina to such violent hatred, that finally, in an outburst of rage, she ordered Catharine from the house. Poor, short-sighted Sister! Forgetting that she had given herself to God, she was about to feel His justice. After this last exhibition of anger her strength suddenly left her, and sinking rapidly, she found that she was in danger of sudden death and of being eternally lost, without the ability to prepare for the last sacraments.

On learning of her state Catharine at once withdrew to her cell, and implored the divine mercy of her Spouse for her Sister, that she might yet be given time to see her fault and to repent: "Lord, O Master, shall I, a wretched creature, be the occasion of another losing her soul, that once held Thy image? Doubtless my faults have been the cause of all this; therefore I will not cease my supplications in behalf of my Sister. Show to her, my Father, her error, that her soul may be saved."

In order that Catharine might possess a more perfect knowledge and be more deeply penetrated with the fearful consequences of being called before the Last Judge while in a state of mortal sin, and thereby inflame in her heart an unquenchable desire to succor and save those perilously near destruction, God revealed to her all the transgressions that Sister Palmerina had committed; their consequences, and the awful danger

that menaced her soul, for her uncalled-for, unjust, and implacable hatred of Catharine, His servant, which had brought down on her own head the wrath of God and a just chastisement. The picture thus presented to Catharine's mind of the soul of her perishing Sister, on the brink of eternity, carrying a load of sin that must surely drag her down, once launched by death into the infinite, caused her to implore God, in an agony of fear and love, to withhold the icy hand about to be laid on that Sister, till the angel of peace and reconciliation could write in her heart the saving words of sorrow.

Three days and nights did Catharine plead her Sister's cause, and for three days and nights the unhappy soul of Palmerina clung to the suffering clay. Then the heart of divine justice was moved to pity, and sending forth one tiny ray from the light of His mercy into the darkness of that struggling soul, He caused it to expand and cast out all its evil, and stilled its throbbing with His grace and love. The same Divine love revealed to Catharine the wondrous change her prayers had wrought in her sister's heart, and hastening from her cell she sought Palmerina. Her life was ebbing slowly away, but on her face there was the sad, entreating smile of reconciliation; in the dying eyes the tender, yearning look pleading forgiveness; in the trembling heart, a deep, a true contrition. A sigh, a word, and the white soul, released from its envelope of clay, took its flight.

Thus was Divine justice tempered with mercy, and Catharine was permitted to see in a vision the soul she had labored so hard to save, enjoying life eternal. This

knowledge was vouchsafed her in order that she might have some conception of how precious to God is the soul that He has shed His sacred blood to redeem; to urge her to still greater effort in seeking out and bringing back to Him the weak and wandering sheep He loved so well; and through her to teach the world to understand and obey His command, "Love thy neighbor"; for in no way can one so surely win his own salvation as by helping to bring back to God his fellow men.

Deeply grateful for the favor granted her from Heaven, and full of the happiness the knowledge had given her, Catharine implored the Saviour to continue to her the ability to see the soul, so that she might the better understand its needs and minister to it when seeking to open its doors to the Creator. This was granted to her directly by the Saviour, who appeared to her, saying: "Because thou dost despise the world, and desirest to attach thyself wholly to Me, who am the perfect Spirit; because thou hast prayed with faith and perseverance for the salvation of one soul,—behold! I endow thee with My supernatural light, which shall show to thee the perfection or deformity of all souls thou shalt meet. I will that all minds shall be an open book to thee, whereby thou mayest perceive all that transpires therein, that thou mayest be enabled to better reach their souls. This shall obtain even with those distant from thee, and whether or not they are the object of thy solicitude or prayers."

From that time Catharine perceived distinctly and without effort the souls of all who approached her, as clearly as she did their bodies. She herself declared,

when taxed with want of humility in allowing persons to kneel when approaching her, "God is my witness that I frequently do not perceive at all the actions of those about me. I am occupied solely with their souls, which I acknowledge I can perceive; the blessed Saviour accorded me that grace when He answered my supplication to save a soul that was in the state of mortal sin, from everlasting punishment. At that time He showed me the inconceivable beauty of the soul, and since then it is rare for me to see any one without at once perceiving their spiritual state. Oh, did men but realize the infinite beauty of the imperishable spirit within them, they would die a hundred deaths before they would allow one mortal sin to threaten its salvation!"

This marvellous insight into the spiritual condition of individuals, possessed by Catharine, was often made apparent to those who accompanied her on her journeys. When persons of outward respectable appearance, but spiritually corrupt, would approach and address her or her friends, she would refuse to answer them, so plainly could she perceive their viciousness; if they persisted, she would say: "We must first purify ourselves from our faults, and deliver ourselves from the bondage of Satan; then we will converse about God." Thus she at once rebuked them for their folly, and protected her companions from contamination.

It would seem that God, in bestowing His choicest gifts on His chosen ones, as on all who receive His grace, demands a just and equitable return, in that they shall be used only to His honor and glory, in revealing

to others the greatness of His love and mercy. The servant so endowed must act as though the Master was present in him when confronted by occasions that would wrest his talents from him. Catharine was no exception, and rejoiced in every trial that proved her worth and merit. At this time there was a Sister of Penance of St. Dominic lying ill with cancer of the breast, that gradually was eating its way deep into the tissues of her body, and from which there was exhaled the characteristic odor of this disease of slow putrefaction. So overpowering was the smell that the nostrils had to be held when approaching her, and few were courageous enough to visit her. On learning of her condition Catharine perceived at once that God sent her this unfortunate Sister that she might usefully employ all the precious gifts with which He had endowed her. Hastening to her side with cheerful countenance, she assured the sufferer that from thenceforth, with her permission, she would assist her to the utmost. Taking her station at the bedside of the forsaken one, Catharine strove to relieve her sufferings by frequently cleansing and dressing the frightful ulcer, although the odor became more and more unbearable. She, however, never showed the least repugnance to it, no matter how long a time the dressing required; nor omitted the smallest detail that could conduce to the comfort of the patient, who was amazed at her constancy and tender charity. One day, having delayed the dressing a little longer than usual, the odor that issued on removing the bandages was so sickening that Catharine's stomach revolted, but summoning to her

aid all her will-power, she repressed it. Impatient at her weakness, she said: "What! thou art disgusted at thy Sister, whom Christ redeemed with His precious blood! Take heed lest thou too fall sick and come to even a worse condition." And quickly resuming her work, she finished the dressing with more care than usual. Another victory for her over self, and therefore over the evil one; a talent bravely used to the benefit of her soul!

This woman was to be the means of testing finally her great patience and humility, that others might not want for an example to direct and guide them when thus assailed. As the days lengthened into weeks, and then months, it was permitted that the evil one should inspire the Sister with a weariness of Catharine's ceaseless devotion, which, as time passed, gradually deepened into a dislike, then hate. Once in this frame of mind, the rest was only natural. She attributed Catharine's perseverance to pride, and a desire to do more than others, and with a mind distorted with hatred she sought to find evil in all Catharine said or did, even going so far as to believe that she was hiding some great sin under a mask of charity. Catharine could not help observing the other's resentment; but divining the cause she remained unmoved, laughing at the enemy whose snares she so well recognized, resting secure in the patience that Heaven ever sends to those who in their need ask it. But the sick old woman, spurred on by the devil, who seeks to do evil for evil's sake, failing to see that in it all he is but the instrument of

God, allowed her tongue to spread the foul calumny that her diseased brain had imagined.

It was quickly carried to the Community, several of the eldest of which came to the woman to find out if the reports were true. Replying to their questions by whatever the devil suggested, she aroused them to a state of great indignation. They called Catharine before them without further proof, and accused her with cruel and bitter words of having disgraced herself and them. With humility she answered, "In the name and by the grace of Jesus Christ I am still a virgin." When they continued to assail her with the infamous falsehood, all she would answer was, "Truly, I *am* a virgin. Truly, I am a virgin."

Although outwardly she maintained her composure and varied not in the discharge of what she considered now her duty towards the author of this frightful calumny, yet her heart was sorely grieved, and in the solitude of her cell she poured forth her burdened spirit in tender supplication to the Redeemer, thus: "My omnipotent Saviour, my beloved Spouse, Thou knowest how precious and delicate a virgin's reputation is, and how exceedingly careful Thy spouses, especially, should be to preserve theirs stainless. It was for this Thou didst confide Thy glorious Mother to the protection of St. Joseph. Thou knowest also, my Redeemer, the efforts that are being made by the father of lies to deter me from what Thy love has made me undertake. Help me then, my Lord, my God, for Thou knowest that I am innocent, and suffer not the old serpent, vanquished by Thy passion, to prevail over me."

At once the answer came to her through the Saviour she had so earnestly implored: He appeared to her holding in His right hand a crown of beaten gold and precious gems; in His left hand a crown of woven thorns. "Beloved daughter," He said, "know that thou must wear one after the other these two different crowns. Choose now the one that thou dost prefer. If thou takest the crown of thorns for this life, I will reserve the other for thee after thy death; but if thou preferrest the precious one now, hereafter thou shalt wear the thorny one."

"Lord," replied Catharine, "I have long since renounced my own will, and promised to follow Thine in all things; therefore I have no choice. But if Thou wilt have me answer, Lord, during this life I desire to conform to Thy Blessed Passion, and that my happiness may be to suffer for Thee." And bending low her head she received from His blessed hands the crown of thorns, which she pressed down till they entered her fair brow. Then the consolation came to her that she had sought, from that sweetest vision that can enthrall a human heart, in these words: "Child, I can do all things; and if I have allowed the breath of scandal to touch thee, it is for thy good, and I will not that it should cease yet. Complete the work for Me that thou hast commenced. Yield not to Satan who would prevent thee, for I will give thee a proud victory over him, and all that he had prepared against thee shall I turn to thy honor and glory. I will uphold thee." The last ringing words of divine truth aroused her enthralled senses, and again she was alone.

In the meantime the scandal started by the sick woman had come to the ears of Catharine's mother. All her virtuous indignation aroused at what she knew to be absolutely without foundation, being certain of the purity and innocence of her child, she cried out, in her just anger, to Catharine, "How often have I begged thee to leave that wicked woman! This is how she rewards thee for all thou hast done; she dishonors thee before all the Sisters. If thou servest her again, if thou dost even approach her, I will no longer call thee my child."

Ah, how often does the tempter make use of a mother's tender sympathies to influence the object of his attack, and so weaken its courage as to render it defenceless! But Catharine, notwithstanding the tender affection she cherished for her parent, would not permit it to interfere between her and what not only her love of God taught her was her duty, but His own words.

So taking both of her mother's hands in her own and kneeling as a little child at her feet, she said to her, with a voice full of tenderness: "Mother, love, does the ingratitude of men prevent God from daily showing His mercy towards sinners? Did not Our Saviour accomplish the salvation of the world on the cross without heeding the insults offered Him? You who are so kind, dear mother, know that if I were to abandon that sick woman, no one would take care of her, and she would die for want of assistance. Should we be the cause of her death? At present she is in the toils of Satan, who through her is allowed to persecute me for

my instruction and her own ultimate salvation. Presently the still voice of God will echo in her heart, the demon of sickly suspicion and diseased hate will flee, leaving her soul to remorse, contrition, and to God."

These words of truth and comfort quieted the mother's anxious heart, and she blessed her child, in whom God's grace was so visible. Returning to the unhappy Sister, Catharine continued with even greater assiduity to relieve her sufferings and to hide her own pain. Surprised at Catharine's quiet, peaceful demeanor after what had transpired, and overcome by the submissive humility displayed in every word and action, the poor diseased woman's heart was touched, soon to be thrown open to admit the messenger of peace.

As time passed on, the woman, lying helpless on her couch of sickness, realized more and more the iniquity of her false accusation, while lost in admiration at the sublime resignation shown by Catharine. One day, as Catharine entered the sick-chamber and approached her charge lying there, she appeared to the sufferer to be suddenly surrounded by a great light that descended on her from above. So exquisitely beautiful was Catharine under the transforming influence of the brilliant light which softened and transfigured her features and form, that the sick woman felt she beheld an angel. Stricken with keen remorse for her base calumny, she gazed enraptured on the glorious vision a long time; and when at last the angelic light was lifted and dispersed, and Catharine's face and form emerged therefrom, the poor, unhappy woman beckoned to her, and

on her breast sobbed out her sinful fault with contrite tears.

"Ah, sweet Sister and Mother," said Catharine, endeavoring to console the old woman, "I do not hold you responsible for this scandal, for I know perfectly well that it was prompted by the enemy of our salvation, who sought to use you for his malicious ends. On the contrary, I thank you for the kind affection that caused your anxiety concerning my virtue." Embracing her, she finished her usual ministrations, leaving her to solitude and once more happy thoughts.

When alone the full force of the enormity of her fault in spreading scandal that might have wrecked a weaker nature than Catharine's fell with startling effect on her mind, and, unable to bear longer the weight of sin, she caused those Sisters to be summoned before whom she had accused Catharine so lightly. She confessed aloud with grievous moans her black guilt, and declared to all that Catharine, about whom she had uttered so much evil, was not only innocent, but that she was a saint, saying that she had had proof of it. And when they demanded an explanation, she described to them the ravishing vision of spiritual perfection and sweetness that the supernatural light had brought out in Catharine's face—that she never before realized what true sanctity and perfection were.

The confession of this woman, who had been the chief instigator of the scandals, and her testimony regarding the vision, caused Catharine to be held in greater esteem and veneration than ever before. Oh, the eternal guiding Wisdom that would rather lead

than drive us; that afflicts us that others may soothe; that tries us with temptation, that we may, like the little child who, seeing a stranger's face, turns from it at once to bury itself in the protecting love of the being from whom it sprung, also turn from it and cast ourselves on Him ! Having reposed in her Creator during the trial, her rejoicing at her release was seen by Him alone, and she calmly pursued her work of charity and self-abnegation.

As she journeyed in that stony path seeking to lose herself in the Love that led her on, the enemy again appeared, and sought by weakening her body to revolt, to win her spirit from the cause of God.

She was dressing the loathsome ulcer of the Sister one day, when there arose from it such a strong odor that, overcome by weakness, her hands dropped by her side and she felt as though she would never be able to continue her self-imposed task of cleansing daily the awful disease. As her eyes turned with a little shudder from the suffering flesh, they fell upon the open casement. Determined to conquer the disgust she felt, she stood a moment in silent prayer, then looking up for aid she saw the blue vault of heaven radiant with the glory of the rising sun. It brought to her mind at once, as though whispered by some Celestial messenger, the resurrection and ascension to life eternal. She thought it must have been a message of love and faith to sustain her; for with a gentle sigh of peace she turned again to the poor sufferer, her mind and heart so full of the love of the Redeemer that her hands acquired a gentler

touch as she washed and bound again the grievous cancer.

Her act and her intention were known above, for that night the Crucified Saviour appeared to her in a vision while on her knees; and showing to her the five wounds that made us heirs of Heaven, He said to her: "Thou also hast sustained great combats, and for Me alone, and I have upheld thee; but never hast thou endeared thyself more to Me than by that act to-day. For Me thou hast despised all pleasures of sense, heeded not the opinion of men, fought bravely against the wiles of Satan, and overcome even nature itself by dressing that terrible ulcer. All this for love of Me! And now, daughter well-beloved, not only shall My heart speak to thine, but thou shalt quaff till thou art surfeited from that spring of love that poured itself out on the cross for all." And drawing down her head he gently pressed it to His wounded side. Her lips drank of the waters of life till her soul sank deep in slumber in the ineffable peace of her Master's love.

Oh, glorious reward for noble deed! Oh, compensating love of God! Oh, saintly soul to see and speak with Him!

CHAPTER XV.

CATHARINE'S MIRACULOUS FASTING AND THE CRITICISM IT CAUSED.

CATHARINE was now approaching a period in her life which was to round out the perfections to which her spirit had attained, and which was to fit her for the more active work of the salvation of souls, to which she had been assigned by a wise Creator. In order that she might not be dismayed by any new manifestations of the Divine Spirit within her, that would subject her body to supernatural influences, the wisdom of the Lord was revealed to her in a vision. It was in her solitary little cell, whilst engaged in silent prayer, that the Son of God appeared to Catharine, saying: "Know, daughter, My wish and will. The smooth current of thy life is now to change. Henceforth it will bound forward, free from the restraint of conventual life, and, swiftly flowing where my footsteps lead, prodigies of love and valor bear, so far beyond the finite comprehension of denying man, that some will stand aghast and say it is not God, but Satan. Thy soul shall so overflow with My infinite grace that its mere earthly habitation shall need no other sustenance, and thy heart shall strive to hold it all, that it may flow from thee to others, whom thou wilt ever seek to bring to Me. I

will raise thee above all consideration of thy sex or nature, and seeking out the haunts of sinful souls, thou shalt be harassed and pursued by sneers and scoffs and scandal-loving outcasts from My love, whom thou shalt strive to win from sin and shame. But I will hold thee high above the lying tongue and wicked lip of slander, and keeping close to Me thou shalt reach down thy slender woman's hand, and draw back from the grinning mouth of hell the precious souls I suffered so to save."

Unconsciously, almost the very words of that Virgin of virgins came to her lips, and she answered: "Thou art my God, and I am but Thy handmaid! May Thy will be accomplished through me. Father, Thou wilt not forget me. Incline unto my aid, according to the greatness of Thy mercy." And as she stooped to kiss the Master's feet a wandering shaft of the dying sunlight entered her cell, showing where He had been.

Straightway the inspired word of Heaven was made manifest. The grace of God flowed in on this pure soul without cessation, and to satisfy her craving love for Christ, she sought Him daily in the Holy Eucharist. As had been foretold to her, all her vital functions were so sustained by it that she no longer needed any other sustenance. In reality the ingestion of food caused her great distress, and it would not remain on her stomach. At first none would believe that this condition was due to anything but imagination, and her relatives, who truly loved her, sought in every way to break her fast, saying it was a temptation of Satan.

Even her confessor joined them in their efforts, and

urged Catharine to partake of food as others did. She protested, vainly, that food made her ill and weak, while without it she was strong and well. Nevertheless he commanded her to eat. Obedient to him to whom she revealed her inmost thoughts, she did as he requested, as far as she was able. These attempts brought on such a serious condition that her life was in danger. Calling her confessor, she said: "Father, if I were in danger of death from excessive fasting, would you not prohibit me from continuing so as to prevent my committing suicide?"

"Certainly," he answered.

"Well, is it not just as bad to expose one's self to death by eating, as by fasting? You can see by the many endeavors I am making to obey you that I am slowly killing myself, for the food I eat remains an undigested load in my stomach. Why do you not then forbid me doing what you see is proving fatal?"

At length the holy man, who had acted with the best intention, began to realize that supernatural force was sustaining his penitent, and answering her, said: "Henceforth act according to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, for I see that evidently God is to accomplish marvellous things through you."

These extraordinary fasts began at Lent and continued all through the holy season until the feast of the Ascension. During this time she partook of no bodily nourishment, while her strength and spirits were not diminished. On the Feast of the Transfiguration of Our Lord she was enabled to partake of some light vegetable food, but immediately she resumed her fast,

and continued it with only rare intervals of interruption.

Though her body was deprived of nourishment, her soul was ever steeped in the knowledge and love of God. The one sustained and made the other possible. Often it seemed that her feeble body would no longer be able to continue its existence; yet when an occasion was presented to her of reaching out a helping hand to save a wandering weak one, the fire of her energetic spirit would light up her dormant faculties, and setting forth with singing heart about the Master's work, she would outstrip in energy and labor the healthy ones who sighed at close of day. When asked one day if she did not at times experience a desire for food, she answered: "God satisfies me in the Holy Eucharist, so that it is impossible for me to desire any kind of bodily nourishment."

When she was pressed on this point and asked whether she did not feel hungry on the days that she did not communicate, she replied: "His sole presence satisfies me when I contemplate it under the form of the Blessed Sacrament; and I acknowledge that to see a priest who has just said Mass makes me very happy."

Catharine felt that she was only fulfilling the command of God, and therefore possessed her soul in tranquil peace, still not without a struggle. Though all could see her life was sustained without the usual food employed by them, yet they would not let her rest in peace, especially those who knew her well. Unable with their little finite minds to fathom the wisdom of the unseen God, who evidently was marking out the

future saint's career, they turned upon her all their barren reasonings, and by the vague and tortuous turnings of their musty sophistry sought to turn her from her chosen ground. Failing thus to call from the celestial heights of supreme love and faith in God this brilliant star of destiny sublime, they reached into their own hearts, and drawing thence the foul slime of slander, calumny, and envious rage, they cast them at her, hoping to drag her down from where they dared not tread. Thus some said: "Could any one equal the Saviour, or the Virgin Mary and the Apostles? Yet they ate and drank." Others said that the Saints had taught us by word and example that we should lead simple lives. Some held that excess in any direction was vicious, and a contempt of God. The gentler ones said that she was the victim of an illusion, while the coarse and depraved openly declared that she was dissembling for the sake of vanity and notoriety, that she did not really fast, but was well fed secretly. Such has ever been the hasty judgment of an unthinking people in the face of evidence they cannot comprehend.

For the sake of refuting any possible doubt to which these alleged arguments may give rise, let us examine them. Our Redeemer fasted forty days at one period. It is related that John came neither eating nor drinking (Matt. xi. 18), yet was he greater than Christ? Some of the saints lived simple lives indeed, yet St. Mary Magdalen is said to have fasted for thirty-three years in a grotto. St. Anthony and other hermits of the desert fasted more than the Apostles, therefore were greater. No, no. Sanctity is not measured by fasting, nor a

holy spirit by long prayers. Hear the words of the Saviour: "That man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that cometh from the mouth of God."

If it be held that we must avoid singularity and extraordinary methods in our lives, it can be answered by saying, Yes, if moved by an impulse of self-glorification, but not if God calls one to it. To resist it would then be to despise His grace; for every act that tends to the honor or glory of God is an impulse from Him.

There can be no doubt that Catharine was moved to her acts by an absolute knowledge of God's will, for she endeavored to conceal her motives through fear of exciting criticism. She suffered from no illusion. That is proven by her previous life, full of beautiful examples of Divine interposition, revealing the fact that though God is distant and unseen by guilty souls and hearts full of foulest sin, yet He delights in whispering words of love and peace and wisdom to the sinless beings who are true to Him.

He directed and inspired her to fast that her body might be so changed and purified, and become imbued so with His eternal grace and spirit, that never could it remain other than a spotless sanctuary for His infinite love, that weary souls might see its light afar, and, seeking rest, be gently led to Him.

CHAPTER XVI.

CATHARINE'S ECSTASIES AND HER WONDERFUL REVELATIONS FROM GOD.

To properly appreciate the extraordinary influence of Catharine's spiritual being over the purely material, it is only necessary to glance rapidly over the past and see how that material life had been ever in subjection to the higher one; so that, free from all the trammelling hindrances that a too-well-nurtured body necessarily entails, the essential, sensitive, thinking, infinite spirit was enabled to escape at times. And leaving in the body the purely animal life to carry on existence, it could soar far above the earthly atoms that but held it here, to seek the great Creator and commune with God.

When in this condition her body presented an appearance of rigid repose, and the operations of her senses were suspended. She neither saw nor heard. The consuming fires of existence were for the time almost extinct. Merely sparks of animation kept the flame alive—just as the lofty flight of the poet's mind leaves his dull clay without memory of its needs.

One day, when more fervent than usual in adoring her Creator, she cried out with the Prophet: "Create within me, O God, a pure heart," etc.; and in the ecstasy of adoration that followed this appeal it seemed

to her that the Redeemer appeared, and placing His hand on her side removed the heart that longed to be with Him. So striking were her feelings when the vision fled, that Catharine sought to find if it were true. No longer could she feel its beating. In no wise alarmed, she related what had passed to her confessor, and in simple manner told him that it seemed to her, as far as she could judge by her experience, that she had no heart. Rebuking her kindly for being thus deceived, he explained that it would not be possible to live without a heart. She very truly answered: "To God nothing is impossible." Not long after this Catharine was in the chapel connected with the Church of the Friar Preachers, remaining after the departure of the other Sisters of Penance of St. Dominic, in order to worship in silence a few moments before the tabernacle of His love. Suddenly she felt herself illumined with a dazzling light, and in the midst of these effulgent beams her Spouse appeared, bearing in His hand a wounded heart aflame with love, and gently laying it within her breast, said: "Thy heart was wholly Mine, and in return I give thee one whose every throb will be for Me, Mine own." And healing with a glance the wound, He vanished from her sight, leaving her again absorbed in silent prayer. The scar left by the vision remained till her death.

Her ecstasies became more and more frequent after this. No sooner would she allow her mind and heart to dwell on Jesus, than at once her faculties would be suspended, and her spirit rise on wings of love to Him.

The heart of love beating within her cast an infinite

grace on all her words and actions, and her mind was so illumined by ecstatic revelations that her soul was ever in a state of joyful peace.

She never drew near to the altar without experiencing some beautiful vision, and this extended to the priest, whom she often saw enveloped in holy light, the Sacred Host he held bearing the image of the Lamb of God. When approaching the holy sacrament the intense joy it excited in her caused her heart to beat violently so as to be heard by persons near, and she seemed on the point of losing all consciousness.

Speaking to her confessor at this time, she said: "Father, do you not perceive a great change in me—that I am no longer the same? Oh! could you but know what I experience, you would comprehend that no pride would ever be able to resist it. My soul is so intoxicated with holy joy that I do not wonder that at times it seems to leave my body. The ever-burning fire of love for my sacred Spouse keeps me so pure and humble that I feel the innocence of childhood, as it were, in my heart and mind. When I think of His love for me, it makes me feel that I could die with pleasure to save my neighbor."

All this was told in strict confidence to her confessor, as likewise were her visions. Among them this one is remarkable:

While engaged in her usual devotions one night, the Saviour appeared to her, and with Him the holy Mother and St. Mary Magdalen. Coming near to her, He said: "What dost thou desire, Catharine, My daughter? Thy will or Mine?" And bowing down be-

fore Him, Catharine meekly answered: "Lord, Thou knowest what I will. Thou knowest that I have no other will than Thine, and that Thy heart is my heart." Seeing St. Mary Magdalen with Him, she remembered how she had bathed His sacred feet, and feeling arise within her the passionate love that Saint experienced then, she gazed fixedly at her, till the Saviour, seeing the desire of her heart, called her to Him, saying: "I came to give thee consolation, My daughter. Behold! in order that thou mayest be comforted at times by reflecting on what others have done for love of Me, I give thee Mary Magdalen for a mother. Thou canst address thyself with full assurance to her, for I have specially charged her concerning thee." Seeking to embrace the saintly mother God had given her, Catharine saw the darkness shut out the vision, leaving her to solitude and the night. From that time she entertained a special veneration for St. Mary, always calling her mother. Indeed the resemblance between them was remarkable in their fasts, love, and contemplation, St. Mary having fasted for thirty-three years; and Catharine from that time until her thirty-third year, when she died, fasted almost continuously.

To Mary Magdalen were revealed the secrets of Heaven. The Divine Presence was often with Catharine, instructing and consoling her. They both loved God passionately, and both contemplated Him their whole lives.

During one of these ecstatic visitations Catharine was heard to be speaking in an undertone, repeating over and over again the Latin words: "Vidi arcana Dei"—

ROSARY GROUP.
Sassoferrato.

"I saw the secrets of God." When she returned again to herself some one asked the meaning of this phrase, and why she had repeated it so often without further explanation. "For the reason," she said, "that it is impossible for me to add anything to it." When still further urged to make this clear to them, she said: "I should reproach myself for using vain words should I undertake to describe to you what I saw. It seems to me that I would thereby almost blaspheme God and dishonor Him by my language. The distance is so vast between what my spirit contemplates when ravished out of myself and in His presence, and my ability to picture it to you, I should feel that I were falsifying, so far short would my description fall of the reality. All I can say is that I saw ineffable things."

One day just after the Feast of St. Margaret the priests were celebrating the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Thinking that Catharine would disturb them by her sighs and sobs, her confessor, Father Laurence, cautioned her to restrain them as much as possible, especially near the altar. Obedient to every word, Catharine remained at a distance from the altar, but besought God to make known to her confessor the great difficulty she would experience in attempting to restrain the emotions produced by contemplating the re-enactment of the scenes on Calvary. At once her confessor felt in his heart that he was wrong, and never repeated his request. While she was thus remote from the altar of her love she felt that consuming desire to participate in the ultimate joys of the sacrifice, by receiving the Body and Blood of the Lamb of God. The intensity of this

desire took such possession of her that, falling into an ecstasy, she softly cried: "Ah, would that I were worthy to receive the Body of Jesus Christ!" Down from the high altar then swept towards her the sacrificed Son, who, reaching forwards, let the ruby stream of life flow from His wounded heart to solace the yearning love of His chosen one. The inexpressible sweetness that filled her soul at moments like these will never be known.

In the same year, on the eve of the Feast of St. Alexis, Catharine was deep in devotion, anxiously awaiting and sighing for the holy Communion. It was revealed to her that she should receive it on the morrow, for which favor she entreated Our Lord to purify her soul so as to render her worthy of receiving Him in the sacrament. At once she seemed to feel a soft descending shower of blood mingled with fire that, falling on her soul, washed out the stains and burned up the evil legacy of Eve. When dawn at last appeared, Catharine found herself almost too weak from recent illness to walk. But remembering what had been promised, she put her whole trust in God, and rising from her couch, to the surprise of all, she directed her steps to the church.

When she had taken her place near the altar she suddenly remembered that her Superior had allowed her to receive Communion from only designated priests, among them her confessor. Finding him absent, she prayed that the favor might be granted that had been promised her. Directly her confessor, who had no thought of celebrating Mass at that time, was touched

with an access of devotion for the Holy Mysteries, and yielding to the impulse, went to the altar nearest to him. There he found the holy maid awaiting him with patient faith. He saw the hand of God, and rejoiced in being the instrument of His will. When the last notes of the silver bell rang out, announcing the Presence of the Master there, Catharine advanced, with tears of joy shining in her eyes, to receive the Sacred Host—a sight that filled her old confessor with rapture. For a long time she remained at the foot of His altar, lost in the contemplation of God's wondrous love.

The following day her confessor asked her to tell him if possible what occurred to her during that happy time. "Father," she answered, "the moment I partook of the Holy Eucharist my senses ceased their action and my soul contemplated a beauty and experienced a sweetness beyond expression. What I saw was so alluring to me that all here on earth seems to me now but vile dust—that is, not only wealth, but the pleasures of the senses; I implored God to deprive me of the desire for these completely, so that I might please only Him and possess Him alone. I entreated Him to take away my will and give me His, and in His mercy He heard my petition and answered me thus: 'Dearest child, I give thee My will. Behold the proof: henceforth no external event will trouble or change thee.'"

In reality from that time no occurrence, circumstance, or contradiction ever disturbed her equanimity. Hers was the will of God.

What a world of absolute peace is contained in these few words! There is no conceivable condition of hap-

piness in time or space equal to the perfect abandonment of self to the will of God. At once the soul of man walks upright in God's footsteps; he looks upon his fellow men with fearless eye; desiring only what is sent, he has no pangs of disappointment or of care. He seeks to do His will, and therefore deeds of kindness mark his path on every hand. He lives in God and God lives in him. He has no times or places, but loves God always.

It is quite comprehensible that it was generally when partaking of the Sacred Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ that Catharine experienced such intensity of devotion that her earthly intelligence was suspended, and only the soul enlightened by the Sacred Host gave voice to heavenly words. This was demonstrated very clearly in one instance. She was about to receive the Holy Eucharist, saying with the priest, "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter," etc., when she heard distinctly an echo as it were in her heart, a still voice say, "And I, *I am* worthy of entering." Penetrated by the Holy Spirit she had just received, when she reached her cell she was so completely absorbed in contemplating her Divine Guest that for several hours her body lay motionless, being raised in the air without visible support. At length it returned to the hard planks again, when through the hitherto silent lips there issued words of such sweet and tender import, that those around her melted into tears, and at the conclusion she added petitions of her own for others' welfare, and among them her confessor. At that very moment, although engaged in purely material affairs, he

was suddenly overcome by an intense fervor and devotion for God such as he had never experienced before.

Later in the day he heard of Catharine's ecstasy. While passing near her cell one of the Sisters related to him the ending of her words in prayer for him. At once he perceived the undoubted cause of his unusual devotion, and going to her he inquired more particularly concerning her experience during the ecstasy. "Father," she said, "I prayed for your salvation, and when I finished I added this: 'Promise me, O Lord, that You will grant it,' extending my hands as though to receive it from Him, saying, 'Lord, grant me a token.' Immediately in the outstretched hand I felt as though a sharp nail had pierced me, and crying out aloud, 'Praise be to Thee, our Lord Jesus Christ,' my eyes opened to behold the wounded palm; and I feel it still, though the scar is visible only to me." Thus was she prepared for the stigmata that she was to receive five years later.

It was when she was at Pisa, and resting with some religious people near the little church of St. Christina. On Sunday Mass was celebrated as usual, Catharine received the holy Communion, and immediately afterwards fell into an ecstasy, as was not unusual with her at these times, when her soul in its transports of love seemed to be trying to free itself entirely from the body. Such seemed to be the case at this time, for as they watched for her to recover from this blissful state, in order to receive the great spiritual consolations her soul would pour forth, her prostrate body was seen to rise a little, assume a kneeling posture, extending its

arms and hands. Her countenance was inflamed with emotion, her eyes closed. Then suddenly, as though she had received a heavy blow, she fell; and shortly after resumed her natural condition. Sending at once for her confessor, she said to him: "Father, I say to you that by the mercy of Our Lord Jesus Christ I have received His sacred stigmata on my body. I saw my crucified Saviour descend, surrounded with a halo of light. The effort of my soul to go and meet its Creator forced my body to rise. Then from the five sacred wounds in the body of Our Lord there issued five streams of crimson hue, that, striking on my hands and feet and heart, left on them the impress of their precious virtue, and I cried out, 'Lord, my God, I entreat Thee that these precious scars may not be seen.'" Listening intently to her recital, her confessor inquired if one of the streams had not entered her right side. "No," she answered, "I was struck by it directly over the heart." "Do you feel acute pain in these places?" he continued. Sighing deeply, Catharine answered, "I feel in these five places, and especially my heart, a pain so violent that without a new miracle it seems to me impossible to live."

Weak and suffering she was conducted to her apartments, where shortly after she became unconscious. Her companions gathered around, and fearing that she was about to leave them gave way to grief. Frequently had they been witness to her ecstasies, but never had she fallen into such a death-like slumber. She aroused a little, and beckoning to her confessor whispered that if God did not come to her aid she would die. He im-

mediately summoned all her spiritual companions who were near, and with streaming eyes besought them to unite in fervent prayer, imploring God to spare the saintly Sister who had by her example strengthened them in virtue and guided them to His love. After sending up their earnest petitions to the Father that Catharine might be spared a little while yet, to bring them to a more perfect knowledge of His love, they gathered around her, and with tearful accents addressed her thus: "O mother, we cannot but know how you long to be forever with your chosen Spouse. But think, dear mother, your recompense is assured, while we are all too weak to be without our guide and teacher. Have pity on us who look to you for consolation and hope, and ask your beloved Spouse, who refuses nothing to your earnest prayers, to leave you with us. We, although unworthy to be heard, have humbly asked it in His name. Obtain for us, mother, what we cannot obtain for ourselves." Amidst all these tears and lamentations Catharine preserved a sad but kindly look, then turning to them said: "It is long since I abandoned my own will for the will of God, and therefore have no wish for others or myself but His pleasure. I desire your salvation with my whole soul, but through Him who died to save us all it must come, and not alone through any creature. Therefore let His will be done. However, I will ask to know what is for the best." So in silence and grief they left her in peace to solitude and God. Their silent prayers were heard. Towards the end of the week she sent for her confessor, and said to him: "I feel that the Lord is pleased to

grant your petition, and I trust in Him to see you all contented."

The next day being Sunday she requested to receive the Holy Sacrament of Communion. Immediately after enjoying this favor she fell into an ecstasy. But this, unlike the preceding one, seemed to give her renewed vigor. All her faculties and strength gradually resumed their sway, and left her in a quiet, natural slumber. She awakened from this so much restored in strength, that the Divine interposition was plain to all.

Some time after, her confessor asked her if she continued to suffer from the wounds she had received, to which she replied: "The Lord has granted your prayers, to the great regret of my soul. The wounds not only do not cause me to suffer, but they sustain and fortify me so much that now I am enabled to bear much more than formerly." Oh, what a glorious and inestimable advocate is earnest prayer! And what a privilege to let the burdened heart pour forth its weight of anxious hope and trembling fear at the Master's feet, and, lifting up her eyes to His, to feel the Master's love and pity flow in an answering stream!

Among the multitude of ecstasies into which the soul of the saintly Catharine had been plunged are some that left a deep and lasting lesson not alone to her, but to all the faithful. She had always evinced a special delight in hearing St. Paul spoken of; and one day—it was the anniversary of his conversion—she fell into an ecstasy so profound that for three days and nights her body remained senseless, so completely was her spirit absorbed in contemplation. Some thought her

dead; others, more intelligent, knew her spirit had been lifted to that third heaven of intellectual bliss where from the Apostle she could learn of God. Recovering very slowly from this state, she remained in a semi-drowsy condition, so reluctantly did her mind resume its grasp of earthly things. Her confessor and a brother Friar, while passing on their way to visit a very venerable monk of the Order of Hermits living some distance away, called on Catharine, and finding that her lethargy continued, they sought to arouse her by saying: "We are going to visit the Hermit. Will you come with us?" Always pleased with such pilgrimages, Catharine, without stopping, or rather being then in no condition, to think, answered: "Yes." But having no real intention of going, it suddenly occurred to her that she had been guilty of a false word. The shock this thought gave restored her dormant faculties, and giving way to intense grief she mourned in solitude for many days. "O thou most wicked and guilty of women!" she said to herself, "is it thus that thou dost utilize the graces that God's infinite bounty has just granted to thee? Is it thus thou dost profit by the great truths that thou hast learned from Heaven? Have not the sublime instructions of the Holy Ghost taught thee not to lie? Thou knowest well that thou hadst no intention of accompanying these religious, and yet thou didst answer them 'Yes.' Thou hast told a falsehood to thy confessor and thy spiritual fathers. Oh, what a grievous sin and wickedness!"

What a mirror-like perfection of soul that shudders and trembles at the fall of the faintest atom on its bril-

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liant, spotless surface! God allowed this shadow to darken for an instant the soul which His revelations had lifted to the regions of eternal light, and thereby render its appreciation of His love more keen, and keep it vigilant to the end of time. The body, which had begun to yield to the sublimity of the emotions that rose within it, was for a time allowed to assert its strength again. It is always thus that divine Providence watches over and instructs us. By elevating the mind and soul to Him, by infusion of His grace and love we are permitted to have glimpses, as it were, of His eternal wisdom and perfection. And then, to let us feel our feeble nothingness, He for a time allows our spirit to fail, that it may find, in the chastisement that the withdrawal of His grace inflicts, a new incentive to seek His aid to mount again the heights, and contemplate the glories of His love.

Unable to find adequate expression for the wonders revealed to her in this ecstasy, Catharine remained silent concerning it, even to her confessor, to whom her life was an open book; only acknowledging that the holy Apostle St. Paul had appeared to her, to admonish her to make her life a meditation—a warning that she failed not to heed.

On the vigil of the Feast of St. Dominic, while celebrating the memory of her patron's life and deeds by silently communing with him at the foot of his altar, Catharine felt the Spirit breathing on her. Her earthly surroundings faded away, and she knelt in the presence of St. Dominic. From him she received astounding revelations, and that these were meant to be made

known to all the faithful was evident, for the vision was recalled whenever she related to her confessor what had been told her. "At this moment I see him more perfectly and distinctly than I see you," she said to him, for he had happened to enter the church at that moment, when Catharine, returning from the vision, was about to seek the solitude of her cell, there to ponder on the words and scenes in which she had just taken part. Kneeling at his feet to tell him the sacred words of truth vouchsafed her, the vision again returned. When about to speak of what had occurred, her brother passed her on his way to his devotions. The slight noise he made, or his shadow falling across the floor, caused her to raise her eyes a mere trifle, but still enough to recognize his face. She hesitated a moment in her speech, then breaking into sobs she shook in silent anguish. Unconscious of the cause of her emotion, her confessor waited patiently till it should pass. After a long interval, interrupted only by her moans, he heard these broken phrases fall from her lips: "Alas, wretch that I am, who will take vengeance on me for my iniquities? Who will punish me for such an enormous fault?" When he asked what sin she had committed, she continued: "Have you not seen how guilty I am since at the very moment God was showing me His wonders I turned my head and eyes to look at some one passing by?" "But," said the Religious, "your glance was so slight that I hardly perceived it." "Ah, if you only saw the reproachful glance the Blessed Virgin cast at me at that moment, you would assist me to weep for my fault." Too broken down by grief to describe then

her vision, she finished her confession, and sought her lonely cell. There again her fleeting, thoughtless glance caused her to receive from the holy St. Paul, who appeared to her, a severe rebuke. Speaking of it afterwards to her spiritual adviser, she declared that she would rather face the ridicule of the whole world than experience again the sense of guilt excited by his sad, reproachful words.

"I can imagine what it will be," she said to him, "to bear the censure of Jesus Christ at the last judgment if the reproof of His Apostle occasioned me such shame." She added that she would have died of ignominy if a vision of the Lamb of God had not sustained her while being reproved.

This is another instance where Divine Wisdom allows a little pebble of fault to fall on the tranquil surface of the soul that it may be stirred throughout, and with the waves of shame and contrite love clear its shining depths of minutest imperfection, to leave it purer in the sight of God.

The vision that had made so deep an impression on her, the description of which her trifling fault had interrupted, is full of solace for the followers of St. Dominic. She saw the Eternal Father, and from His mouth there issued a Divine flame, that with His breath took form and features like unto Him who died to give us life. Presently there stepped forth, at a motion of His hand, another figure of a coarser mould, but all shining with the fire of Divine truth. Then a voice fell on her waiting senses, a voice of infinite sweetness, saying: "Catharine, My daughter, I have these two sons. The

One thou knowest as My only Beloved, thy Spouse; the other, though of earth-born parents, is Mine in spirit. Thou now dost see St. Dominic as he lives in My love." Amazed at this astounding revelation concerning her patron, Catharine remained speechless. "My Son from all eternity, to save the world, clothed Himself with human form and lineaments, and for His will took Mine. My son Dominic gave up his will, and followed none but Mine; his life was without stain, his soul unblemished, and the grace of Baptism was never lost by him. My Beloved Son, who is the Eternal Word, gave to the world the Truth I charged him with. My inspired son carried to the renegade and traitorous apostates from My holy Catholic faith the regenerating truth purchased on Calvary. The Son of God died to save men's souls, and left with you His Disciples and His Church. The son Dominic lived only to save men's souls, and left you his Friar Preachers and his Order."

Such were the visions and revelations as given by Catharine in the confessional, the seal of which she allowed to be removed before her death.

The continual state of spiritual exaltation maintained by Catharine brought about in time a semi-torpor of her body, so marked, that at last she could not rise from the couch of wood on which she remained without sleep or food. But, sustained by constant visions of her Blessed Spouse, she murmured nothing but His blessed name. And crying out once in the ardor of her desire, "Oh, why, my beloved Master, does this miserable body deprive me of Thy heavenly embrace? Alas, in this melancholy life nought gives me pleasure

but the thoughts of Thee. I implore Thee let this wretched body no longer prove an obstacle to my lasting happiness," she heard from Him the answer that should find an echo in every heart too anxious for its earthly welfare: "Beloved daughter, when I dwelt among men I accomplished not My will, but My Father's. My Disciples have given testimony of this. I desired greatly to eat with them the last supper, and yet I waited with patience the moment fixed by My Father. Therefore, notwithstanding the ardent desire that you have to be entirely united to Me, you must wait My hour with resignation." Catharine meekly answered: "Since it is best that Thou shouldst not consent, Thy will be done. Yet deign to hear my simple prayer: whatever be the duration Thou shalt fix to my existence, grant me that until my death I may participate in all the sufferings Thou hast endured. If I cannot be with Thee now in heaven, let me be united to Thee, at least, in Thy passion on earth."

This was granted to her. The sufferings of her body so increased as to bring vividly to her mind the agony of Our Lord. He revealed to her that from the moment of His conception till the last sad moment of His life He had borne in His soul the heavy cross of desire to redeem mankind. Thus it was with her as with other chosen ones; the torment of desire to save men's souls was the heaviest cross she could bear.

In speaking of His passion she brought out this idea in a unique manner. "Our Saviour," she said, "from His birth drank deep of the chalice of desire for man's redemption, and when he said in the garden, 'Father,

let this chalice pass from Me,' He meant that all His desire should pass and merge itself in the last great act, that would in itself accomplish all He wished. That He desired to advance, if possible, the hour of redemption, is shown when He said to Judas, 'What thou doest, do quickly.'" When told that this was not the accepted explanation of His words, she answered: "The actions and words of the Redeemer are so fruitful in instruction, that by careful, constant meditation on them, each one finds a special source of nourishment for his soul's needs."

She said in confession that it had also been revealed to her that the cause of the Saviour's agony and bloody sweat in the Garden of Olives was His foresight of so many souls failing of participation in the fruits of His passion. "But He had added, 'Not My will, but Thine,' which revealed the Son of God; for had He not added that, His will alone would have kept them from this danger."

At another time, when speaking of this subject, and her ecstasies, she described one vision, in which it was revealed to her how infinitely great were the sufferings of Christ. They would have produced death in an ordinary man a thousand times over. This can well be appreciated when it is remembered that though the thorns passed through His skull, though His members were disjointed, though He had received more than five thousand lashes, yet supported by His divinity He endured it to the cruel end. It was to show us that truly He was the Son of God. He desired to make manifest to us the immensity of His love, and He could not have

proved it more effectually. Fr. Raymond expressed this beautifully when he said: "It was love, not nails, that fastened Him to the cross; it was love, not men, that triumphed."

By means of what was revealed to her during her ecstasies, Catharine was enabled to give some idea of the agony of Our Redeemer. The greatest torment He suffered was, she thought, the dislocation of the bones of the breast, principally because in a minor degree similar sufferings had been given her, as she had asked; and this pain was permanent and grievous, while the others were transient. Daily she suffered from pains in the head and side, but those in the breast surpassed them all, no doubt on account of the vicinity of the heart. For several days Catharine suffered these exquisite tortures in her breast, and though they greatly enfeebled her, yet she felt that she was experiencing something of the agony of Our Lord; which gave her also a faint idea of how great His love must have been, to have endured what was a thousand times worse.

So she suffered joyfully but in silence, till at last the overburdened heart, weak from the intense emotions that the contemplation of the life and love of Jesus aroused, and filled with but one consuming desire, to be with Him, gently burst its bonds, and for a time lay still. Her companions coming, found her there, lifeless and motionless. They sent at once for her confessor, Friar Thomas, to assist her in her agony. In haste he came, and with him another Religious, Friar Antonio, and these with the Sisters of the Order began the Office for the dead. The tidings spreading,

Friar Bartholomew of Montucio and Friar John of Siena joined them in chanting with sobbing tones the litany for the dying; and in the midst of this most solemn moment Friar John, who felt the parting from his loved mother with keenest anguish, fell to the floor, the blood pouring from his heaving breast. The violence of his grief had ruptured a vessel in the lung, and he lay as one dying. Almost distracted by this double catastrophe, they knew not what to do to save the Brother. Friar Thomas, Catharine's confessor, spoke to John in earnest tones, full of strong abiding faith, saying: "Brother, I know the influence of this holy woman with God. You need only apply her hand to the place you suffer the most violent pain, and you will certainly be cured." The Brother at once complied, and at that moment he was as completely restored as if nothing had occurred. All the Religious who surrrounded Catharine at the time, as well as many of the neighbors who, out of curiosity, had come to see the dying saint, fell on their knees, adoring God for the wonders vouchsafed their companion. Meantime Catharine had showed no signs of returning life till many hours after, and then, midst the prayers and chanted litany, she moved her lips and spoke to them again; and the light of life once more burned in her eyes, that now were shedding tears of sorrow for her cruel restoration. "Father," she said to her confessor, "would you not pity a soul that had been released from its dark enshrouding prison, only to be plunged back again, after its glimpse of freedom eternal? God must have willed it thus on account of my sins."

Awaiting till Catharine should recover from this frightful strain, Friar Thomas forebore questioning her. When again she sought his spiritual offices he took the opportunity of examining her closely on the details of her death, saying: "Then, reverend Mother, your soul was really separated from your body?" "Yes," she answered, "the ardor of my love for God was so intense, and the desire I felt to be with Him was so imperative and forcible, that no heart, had it been even of iron, could have resisted; and so mine was broken. Yes, the heart that beats in this poor frame was sundered by love, and my soul escaped. The heavens opened and received my spirit, and there I beheld such secrets of the living God that I am incapable of telling on this earth, for memory is too feeble and human language inadequate to render intelligible such themes. It would be like presenting clay for gold. Only, when I reflect on all I saw and heard in that state, I feel the keenest grief that I was forced to leave them and take up once more the earthly miseries I had left behind." Urged to tell him all she could of what had passed, she continued: "Know, father, that my soul entered into one vast region of eternal light, where reigns the Creator, essence of all things, who sat in judgment on the souls of men. To the just He opened wide His glory, too great for earthly senses to contemplate. Were it not that I am supported here by the love of God, and for my neighbors, I should pine away with longing for this happiness which one day may be mine. But now I feel a great consolation in suffering still more, for it is only by suffering that a soul can be so purified as to see God.

Hence tribulations are stepping-stones to heaven. And there I saw, too, the souls lost forever, and the torments of Hell and Purgatory. Oh! had poor mortals the faintest glimpse or knowledge of the consequences of incurring the wrath of Almighty God, and see the torments of these places, they would die a thousand deaths rather than undergo the least of them for a single day. I saw particularly those who sin in the married state by not observing the laws it imposes, and seeking in it only sensual pleasure. And this is because little attention is given to it, and consequently less contrition is excited for it. Nothing is more dangerous than a little fault that is never washed away by Penance.

"While my soul drank in rapt contemplation these mighty secrets of the just Creator, I heard the voice of my Spouse sounding in my ears, saying: 'Thou beholdest what glory they lose and what torments awaits those who despise My sacrifice and reject My love. Return, then, with this knowledge to the distant earth-life, and show the weak and straying ones the way to life and glory eternal; and what appalling terrors seethe and groan for traitors to My love.' My affrighted soul started at the words condemning it again to earthly prison, but the voice of the Lord called me, saying: 'Thy work is not yet finished, nor even yet begun. Henceforth thou wilt renounce thy solitary cell, and taking up thy path among the busy thoroughfares of life, thou shalt seek out and rescue those I seem to have died for in vain. I will hold fast to thee, that naught may harm or hurt thee. I will confide to thee the honor of My holy name, and thou shalt teach my doc-

trine to the lowly and the great, to laymen, priests, and monks. To thee I will impart such speech as none can resist. I will place thee in the presence of Pontiffs, and the Rulers of both the Church and the people, and show to them that I rule over all.' Then the voice ceased, the light faded, and once more my spirit, plunged in darkness, sought the weary clay, there to work the mighty Master's bidding, and await the joyful day of its release. I was so much overcome with grief that, as thou knowest, for three days I shed bitter burning tears. Even now, Father, my heart bleeds for the joys of Heaven I possessed. My consolation is the will of God and the love of my neighbor. If I love so ardently the souls whose conversion God has confided to me, it is because they have cost me so dear. They separated me from God, and deprived me of His presence for a time ; but they will prove my glory, my crown, and my immortal joy."

CHAPTER XVII.

MIRACLES PERFORMED BY CATHARINE.

"WONDERFUL is the Lord in His saints." "Thou hast made men a little less than angels."

Truly were the words of the Psalmist realized in Catharine. It is through mortals such as she that the voice of Christ is heard throughout the land, seeking the sheep that were lost; it is through them that His hand overcomes the artificial obstacles that our obstinate wills have created, and brushing aside supposed natural laws, rescues from the hideous deformity of sin the precious souls the Father breathed upon. As though the tender Saviour wished to prepare His handmaid for her new career, and at the same time make glorious what otherwise would have brought her grief, He made it known to Catharine that her father's days were numbered, and that his soul would be the first she would save.

It was Jacomo, Catharine's father, who first had recognized the tender germs of sanctity in his child, and who, in happy submission to the will of His divine Master, had so nurtured and protected them, that there had sprung up between him and his child a bond of intense affection, strengthened by his respect for the presence

of the divine spirit within her, and by the obedient humility of Catharine towards her father.

Jacomo's greatest happiness lay in contemplating the growing perfection of his saintly daughter, through-whose merits he hoped to obtain mercy before God. Catharine had all her life prayed for his salvation. Now, the labor of his life being done, and death's handmaid, sickness, watching by the weakening body, Jacomo felt the time was near when he must close the last chapter of his earthly deeds. Calling Catharine, he bade her pray for him. Catharine threw herself upon her cell floor with all the filial affection of her pure heart bursting forth, and implored the Father to restore her father's strength, and leave him with her yet a little while. But the Divine answer was whispered in her heart: "His usefulness is over, his span of life is ended, his time has come." Then, rising from her knees, she humbly kissed the rod; and full of God's purpose, hastened to her dying father's bedside, to help him close his eyes and heart upon a world of sorrow, and speed with the sublime words of faith his parting soul to God.

Knowing better than others his faults, as she did his perfections, Catharine sought to obtain pardon for them, as well as the remission of all punishment due to them, by pouring out her heart in earnest prayer for that one object. Swiftly the answering voice from Heaven replied: "Thy father has lived well in the married state, and tried to do his duty as he saw it. He has done many things acceptable to Me. Particularly pleasing was his conduct towards thee. But, alas! he

has left many things undone, and justice demands that his soul be purified from all stain of sin by fire." Still reluctant, Catharine cried again: "O most loving Saviour, how can I endure the thought of seeing him whom Thou gavest me for a father, who nourished, sheltered, and loved me all these years, suffering the tortures of such cruel flames! I implore Thy tender mercy to find some means to grant me this my prayer; 'tis for my father's soul, O Jesus. Call it not away, O Father! till I obtain from Thee this pardon." Finding that the light of life still burned within her father's breast, with but her prayers to feed upon, Catharine, in the agony of one last appeal, offered herself to bear his merited chastisement, saying: "O Lord, thy justice demands compensation. Let me bear my father's punishment, and take Thou his soul direct to Thee." In mute prostration she heard vibrating on her ear the saving words of God, saying: "Daughter, Faith and Charity have won for thee thy wish. Let it be so done. Thy father's soul from purgatory's flames is free. But thou, his child, shalt carrry to thy grave the pain his faults have caused Me." Rising to her feet, the words of thankful joy still trembling on her lips, Catharine flew to her dying parent's side, and whispering in his ear the words that assured him life eternal, saw a smile of supreme joy and peace flit over his face, taking with it the soul whose happiness she had won. In that very instant a grievous pain in Catharine's side announced that the judgment of the Lord had begun; and to her grave she carried it.

In the last sad moment Catharine cried aloud with

smiling lip and countenance serene: "Bless the Lord, O my father! How happy were I now like thee!" While the usual ceremonies were being celebrated, Catharine moved about with happy face and cheering words of consolation for her mother and her friends. It was not to be wondered at, for the father she had loved so well was happy in the life eternal.

Thus in peaceful sacrifice Catharine's work began; and she gloried in the wisdom of the Lord, who, wishing to at once instruct and arm her, had removed her earthly father and support; had allowed her to become the means of his salvation; had left with her a lasting reminder of His justice, that she might also teach others how to bear their sufferings.

At this time there lived in Siena a very wealthy man named Andrea of Naddino, who from his youth had turned from God, and given himself up to every form of vice and iniquity that his riches could procure. Gambling was his passion, to which was added the black, traitorous sin of blasphemy. But his evil ways had only shortened his life; for in his fortieth year he was stricken down by sickness, and having dissipated his strength and manhood by his riotous living, no hope of saving him was entertained. Wretched alike in mind and body he tossed upon his bed of pain, until the curate of the parish, hearing of his need of consolation, came, seeking to help the weary soul within. But never having frequented the church, whose priests and sacraments he had despised, the unhappy man repulsed them both. Then his wife and little ones came softly to his side, and kneeling down sought with tears and with

tender words of entreaty to unlock the portals of his heart to God. Deaf alike to children, wife, and God, the miserable man drew around him closer still his cloak of sin, and, glorying in his shame, drifted nearer to the mouth of hell. Again the good priest called at dawn of day, and pleaded that he listen to a word. But, turning on the man of God, with wrathful oaths he ordered him to the door. Grieved and sick at heart to feel that this once bright soul was trembling on the brink of destruction, Friar Thomas hastened to Catharine to beg her in the name of charity to raise her voice in earnest prayer to Heaven for the deliverance of this blackened, sinful soul.

Finding Catharine in an ecstasy, and unable to wait the conclusion of her soul-communion on account of approaching night, he left his message with a Sister watching by her. It was early morning when Catharine's spirit ceased its flight into the realms of bright and happy visions, and resumed again its daily toil. As soon as she had heard the pressing need of prayerful intercession for this hardened sinner, however, inflamed with fraternal charity, she sank again into an ecstasy, imploring God to have compassion on this unhappy sinner, bound to her by the indissoluble tie of Christ's redemption. To her petition she heard an answering voice: "This man's iniquities are crying out against him in heaven. Horrid blasphemies has he cast at the Son of God and His saints. He has reviled the Church and sacraments, and cast My image in the flames, laughing the while in derision. He was not ig-

norant of the law. He merits death a thousand times. Let his infamy burn now into his soul forever."

Bursting into tears, Catharine invoked the Blessed Redeemer in her cause, saying: "Didst thou not, O loving Jesus! bear this man's sins with that most grievous cross on Calvary? Saviour, help me save this soul. As Thou hast promised to aid me when I call on thee, I ask it now. I have no other consolation for Thy absence but the one of seeing men return to Thee. Refuse not my request, O clement Jesus! Restore to my brother his sense of guilt, and lift him from the quicksands of destruction." Sinking at His feet, her streaming eyes and aching heart won pity from the Master, who stilled the anguish of her soul with these words of grace: "Peace, My daughter! Thy wish is granted thee: this night his guilty soul will be shriven. I go to him."

The dying man was tossing on his couch, with yelling, exultant demons dancing in his heart and soul, when, lo! the fever left him, and in an entrancing vision he saw the form and features of the Son of God, who, casting on him a look of tender pity, lifted His wounded hands, saying: "My son, confess thy sins and I will lift them from thee, even as I bore for thee the cross to Calvary." Reaching out to grasp the hands of Mercy, he cried, "I see my Lord, my Saviour! Save me, save me!" When the gentle priest of God was called he found the vision gone, but in the heart of Andrea His image glowed, and in its light and love Andrea's soul was shriven.

Not long after this Catharine's wondrous intercession

was again required. Two brigands had been captured, and having been condemned to expiate their many crimes, were brought to Siena for punishment and death, as an example to others. They were fastened in a cart to an upright pole, that all might see them; and then the executioners tore their flesh out with red-hot pincers. Hardened in sin, they were proof against the words of sympathy and suggestions of the priests to save their souls. Even as they were led along the streets, a fearful warning to their fellow men, they shrieked aloud in frightful agony, blasphemies against Almighty God. The fiery tortures of these outcast men did not cause their souls to see the yawning pit beneath them, and cry out for mercy to a loving God. Nevertheless He willed to show it to them, and through His handmaid, Catharine. It was decreed that on that day she should leave her usual apartment, to pass a short time in spiritual teaching at the house of Alessia. While there, Alessia heard the noise and tumult in the street, and, looking to see the cause, beheld the unhappy criminals passing by, suffering the execution of their fearful sentence. Running to Catharine she cried: "O mother, what a frightful spectacle is here before the house! There are two men who are condemned to be torn with heated irons, going to execution." Moved by pity, Catharine gave them one glance, then retired at once to intercede for them, having seen with the eyes of spiritual perfection a wild troop of demons torturing the souls of the unhappy men, and keeping them from seeking God. In the simple eloquence of earnest prayer her voice rose to the Saviour: "Lord,

who in the abandonment of Thy love for us didst die to save all men, let not these poor unhappy creatures perish. The thief hanging by Thy side on Calvary, though black with iniquity and wrong-doing, lifted up his voice in all his agony, and confessed Thee God. Well did he merit hearing Thy precious promise: 'To-day thou shalt sup with Me in Paradise.' Let shine Thy grace, O Lord! on these abandoned ones, and though they cry not out to Thee, yet hear my voice for them, O God, my Master! and let their souls not perish." Though the pursuing demons attacked her in their fury and swore that, if she ceased not her intercession for what was now their own, they would seize upon her body and leave her possessed; "What God wills, I will," uttered in the quiet tones of faith sent them hurtling back to their unhappy victims.

Then from His high abode stepped down the Son of man as though fresh from the bloody hill of sacrifice, and looked into the hearts of the poor, tormented outcasts from all men. When they saw His face the deformity of their souls stood forth revealed in all its hideous blackness; the streaming tears of sorrow flowed from their long-choked springs of love, and opened up their heart and lips to God. Their blasphemies were changed to cries for mercy; they acknowledged aloud their many heinous crimes, and the justice of their punishment; they ceased reviling their executioners, thanking them instead; and happy in the Saviour's promise of never-ending glory, asked to see one of His ministers, confessed their sins, and receiving His most precious Body and Blood, ended the expiation

with their lives. All were dumbfounded at the change, but none ever knew whence came this miracle of grace, save Catharine's confessor. To this she added a few days later another, for on coming forth from an ecstasy she was heard to exclaim, "Lord, I thank Thee for having delivered them from a second prison." She had obtained their release from Purgatory and secured for them life eternal.

If bringing back to a brief life again the earthly body be accounted a great miracle, what shall be said of bringing to a soul, life eternal! In the resurrection of a body all the elements of which it is composed are in an absolutely passive state, incapable of offering by the movements of its tiniest atom any resistance to the will commanding it; whereas in a wrecked and debauched soul free-will is running riot, and arrogates to itself the qualities of an independent entity, opposing the slightest attempt at restriction with the stubborn resistance of its fatuity and infidelity. Hence, as St. Gregory says, the conversion of a single sinful soul displays the Divine power more gloriously than the creation of a world. The body raised to life must die again; the soul revived may live for all eternity.

It is related of many of the saints that they brought the dead to life, and we stand aghast at the miracle. What shall be thought of Catharine, who, by the power of her prayers alone, so acceptable was she in the sight of God, suddenly brought contrition, and thereby everlasting life, to two guilty souls. It is not strange that if she could bring about this wonderful result through the efficacy of her prayers alone, without

having seen the object of them, her influence over those whom she conversed with was equally miraculous. This was shown in the case of the family of Francis Tholomei; it was composed of his wife, named Rabès, and several sons and daughters. Among the sons was one called Jacomo, an incorrigible criminal, proud, cruel, and tyrannical, who, though young, had twice imbrued his hands in blood. His ferocity and audacity made him greatly feared by all who knew him. He had thrown aside the lessons of God's love, which his pious mother had taught him at her knee, and gloried in his wickedness. One of his sisters, named Ghinoccia, resembled him somewhat in that she was passionately fond of the world in the full and ugliest sense of the word. Her time was spent in adorning herself that she might thereby attract attention; and that she had not given up all her self-respect was only because she dreaded to lose that of the world. The devout mother, seeing the downward path into which her children's feet were straying, went to Catharine and begged her to use her influence with her daughters, especially Ghinoccia. For Catharine this was one of the opportunities for which she ever longed, and she hastened to grant Rabès' request. So well did the love of Jesus sink into her heart and mind through listening to the ardent eloquence of the inspired Catharine that Ghinoccia renounced the world with all its empty pleasures, and cutting off the long and glossy hair that she had prized so highly, knelt humbly at His altar and received the habit of the Sisters of Penance of St. Dominic. Under Catharine's guidance and example she became a model

for the rest. Her sister Francesca soon followed her into the devout Order of Penance. It was a glorious victory for Catharine to not only rescue from the rapacious maw of sinful vanity these two precious souls, but place them forever beyond its specious toils.

Catharine's work was not complete, however, for she had yet Jacques to reconcile. He had been absent from Siena at the time of his sisters' conversion. When he returned and learned of their self-sacrifice, he was filled with rage against his brothers, whom he taxed with countenancing their design. In his arrogant rage and disapppointment he swore dire vengeance against the whole Dominican Order, and threatened to go and tear off his sisters' habits and bring them back to the world again. His little brother, who had listened to Catharine discourse on the love of God, was inspired to say: "Jacomo, I assure you that were you to go to Catharine you would be converted, and would confess your sins." But in his thwarted anger he flung the lad from him, muttering that sooner than do that he would *kill* all the priests and sisters. Still the boy repeated the prophecy, unmindful of his brother's threats and curses. Arriving at his home Jacomo turned on his family in a perfect fury, denouncing them all as accomplices, and vowing vengeance if his sister did not renounce her life of penance and take up the old one with him again.

His mother, Rabès, with tears and supplications quieted his passion for the time. Then she sent for Friar Thomas, Catharine's confessor, who responded at once, fortunately bringing with him Friar Bartholo-

mew, another Dominican. He found Jacomo, listened to and combated his furious arguments, but could do nothing toward convincing him of the iniquity of his life. But there was a powerful advocate at hand, who at that moment, though hidden in the cloister's solemn solitude, saw with her eyes of perfection a vision of the wicked brother's soul. Affrighted at the aspect of this low, fallen spirit, whose radiance was blotted out by foul degrading sins, around which danced exultant demons urging it to drag down his sister's soul as well, Catharine opened her heart in prayer to God. She implored that these monsters might be driven from him, and that he might accept the healing words of grace, and with the waters of repentance let his soul shine pure again in the sight of God. At that moment, when Friar Bartholomew sought to accomplish what Friar Thomas had failed in, the soul of Jacques received the chastening baptism of grace through Catharine's prayer; and kneeling humbly at the Friar's feet he poured out in confession all his guilt, and heard with contrite heart the consoling words of absolution.

Catharine in her ecstasy was made aware of all that had transpired, and when the religious Brethren visited her as usual, greeted them with this announcement: "We must render thanks to God, because Jacomo Tholomei, who was a slave to Satan, was delivered this morning. He has confessed to Friar Bartholomew. Fathers, the loving God never disregards the fervent prayers of His children, and often grants their desires, if they are sought for His glory. The enemy of salvation had resolved to rob us of one sweet lamb, but God,

the Shepherd, shielded what was His; and now Satan has lost Jacomo, of whom he had become master."

The far-seeing wisdom of the Master-mind was evident in all this. Catharine's intercession and prayers, her influence and example, had placed three white souls among His chosen ones on earth; for Matthew, the brother next to Jacomo, also renounced the world and entered the Order of St. Dominic. It left in the world a purer, cleaner man in Jacomo, who, though he married, never lost the meekness his conversion brought him. To each she brought the special grace required. Her work had only just begun.

Her confessor, Friar Thomas, tells of another instance of the wonderful influence Catharine had over sinners. There lived in Siena a man named Vanni, who was celebrated to a certain extent on account of his genius, whose character was marred, however, by two unfortunate and wicked traits. First, he not only disregarded but despised the laws of God; and second, he would satisfy any real or fancied hatred by striking his victim in the dark. Several murders had been committed, but none could be found to accuse him, for fear of his deadly anger. Often those with whom he had any difference would send mediators to him offering reconciliation; but these advances always met with the same response—that it did not depend on him to make peace, as he was not acquainted with the manner of bringing it about. These were only subterfuges for him to nurse his vengeance until he had an opportunity of wreaking it.

Catharine had heard of Vanni's wicked character,

and was very desirous of changing it by having some conversation with him on the subject; but he always carefully avoided her. At length a very holy monk, called Brother William, of the Order of Hermits of St. Augustine, used his powers of persuasion with enough efficacy to overcome his prejudice, and obtained his consent to go and see Catharine, although at the same time he refused to promise to accede to her wishes. Catharine's confessor happened to be waiting to see her the day that Vanni called, and hastened to him with marks of the pleasure that the visit gave him. Friar Thomas informed him of the absence of Catharine, at that time on some errand of mercy, and urged him to wait till her return, and thinking to keep him interested, the good Friar took him to her little cell, or better shrine, for it had more than once been sanctified by the Holy presence. In a short time Vanni became tired of waiting and started to leave, saying: "I promised Friar William to come here and listen to this lady; she is absent, and my occupation prevents my remaining longer. Will you be so good as to excuse me? Really I have too much to do."

Greatly distressed at Catharine's unfortunate absence and praying for her speedy return, Friar Thomas engaged him in a conversation on reconciliation. Impatient at being delayed, he said: "Seeing that you are a priest and a monk, and this lady also bears a reputation for great sanctity, I will not try to deceive either of you. I therefore frankly avow and declare that I will never do anything you may request. In strict confidence I admit that it is I who prevent peace. If I consented

to listen to the overtures made, all would be adjusted; but I will not, and it is idle to preach to me on that subject, as you will find. I have already confided more to you now than I ever did to any one before. Let us drop the subject." Further attempt to detain him was useless; then the hand of Providence led Catharine to the door, to the great joy of Friar Thomas and the disgust of Vanni. As soon as she saw them she bowed to him, this red-handed man of the world, with a smile of rare sweetness; then seating them, she inquired the nature of his errand. Vanni explained his promise to Friar William, adding that it would be futile to attempt to change his opinion. Not discouraged, Catharine sought, by portraying the infinite consequences that would result to his immortal soul, to soften this impenetrable crust of unbelief that had blotted from it all semblance to its Maker, but did not make the slightest impression. She turned and entered her cell, seeking to obtain by prayer from the Throne of Mercy what her eloquent ardor had failed to accomplish. Friar Thomas held Vanni a few moments in conversation, when the unbeliever suddenly said: "Through politeness, I will not refuse you entirely. I have four enmities, so I will consent to give up the one that would give you the most pleasure," and prepared to depart, when suddenly he exclaimed: "O God, what consolation my heart has received for these simple words of peace that I have uttered! O Lord! what wondrous change is this? I feel Thy power has chained me here till I—yes! yes! I confess, my Saviour, my Redeemer. Holy Virgin, help me now! Save me, blessed Jesus, from the demon

that has held me captive so long. Pity my unhappy soul, and release it from the bonds of Satan. Father, hear my wretched story, and find it in thy heart to grant me absolution." And, kneeling at once before the holy friar, he, by the sacrifice of a little pride, gained the highway to life eternal.

Not longer after his conversion Vanni, now no longer feared by his enemies, was through their influence cast into prison, and it was generally reported that he was to be beheaded. In great distress, Friar Raymond went to Catharine with the news, saying: "This man's faith is being fearfully tried. When in the toils of Satan everything prospered with him, but now that he has turned to God misfortune seems to be trying to drag him down again. I am afraid, mother, that the flower of his faith is not yet strong enough to withstand the breath of adversity. He may fall into doubt, and therefore needs your prayers. It is imperative that you, who rescued him from destruction, should save him from that other pit, despair." Catharine quietly answered: "Why are you alarmed on his account? You should on the contrary rejoice. Is it not plainly evident to you that God has remitted the eternal punishment due his sins, in sending him temporal oppression. The wicked in the world often seek to destroy what is good in others, that it may not be a continual rebuke to themselves. His conduct in the past merited the justice of God; his humility now has won His mercy. Do not fear that he will be discouraged. He who saved him from Hell will not let him perish from despair."

So it happened. Vanni was released from prison, but

was compelled to pay a very heavy fine, at which Catharine rejoiced, saying: "God has taken away the poison that was destroying him." Trials and anxieties only increased his fervor, as had been predicted; and desiring to express in some fitting way his gratitude to Catharine for having rescued him from his life of iniquity, and as a testimony to her saintly life and character, he presented her with a fine mansion he possessed a little way out from the city, that she might establish there a monastery for Sisters. This Catharine did with special authority from Pope Gregory XI., and bestowed on it the name of "Holy Mary, Queen of Angels." This was only one of the many grateful acts performed by Vanni in memory of his conversion, to which he was faithful till the end.

It would be impossible to enumerate the conversions effected by Catharine, or to estimate the vast amount of good she performed in aiding the devout spiritually, encouraging the feeble of faith, consoling the afflicted, and relieving the poor. Encouraged by her life and example and assisted by her prayers, how many were saved who would otherwise have fallen under the fierce attacks of Satan, who sought by infidelity, vanity, envy, anger, and lust to drag them down to hell! Well has it been said of St. Catharine, in the words of St. Jerome: "If I could exclaim with every part of my body, it would still be impossible for me to enumerate the fruits of salvation borne by this virgin plant, cultivated by the Heavenly Father."

Thousands flocked to her for aid, counsel, consolation, and contrition, for her prayers and powerful in-

tercession. All who saw and spoke with her renounced at once their evil ways, and sought through her the shrine of penance. So numerous were the conversions effected by her, that Pope Gregory XI., deeply touched by the grace God had given her, granted to Friar Raymond and two other monks the power reserved only to bishops—to absolve all who were presented to them by Catharine.

With the aid of her companions and confessors she tried to see all who came. Often remaining for days without rest, she prosecuted her noble work, and none were turned away. With a holy joy and peace shining in her face she scattered the messages of God's love about her, and in her heart reposed her blessed Spouse.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OTHER EXTRAORDINARY MIRACLES.

CATHARINE'S mother, Lapa, though a very kind and simple hearted woman, was still much attached to the things of this world—so much so that she entertained a perfect horror of death. The loss of her husband had been a grievous blow to her, from which she did not recover; for it was not very long after it that she fell sick, and her condition became very serious. Catharine had recourse to the Fountain of Love and Wisdom, which never fails all those who stoop to drink from its eternal stream, and pleaded that her mother's health might be restored. Bending low she heard the Comforter say, that if her mother were taken then to the other life beyond she would avoid many troubles that would make her wish to die. Returning to her mother, she sought by means of holy exhortations to prepare her for the last great change, if it pleased God to call her. But Lapa loved the world too well to submit without a struggle; and terrified at the thought of dying, implored Catharine to plead with God for the cure of her disease, and to spare her life. Seeing with grief the havoc that worldly attachment was making with her mother's soul, and desiring that she should become reconciled to the will of God, whatever it might be, be-

fore she died, Catharine prayed that this might be granted her. The prayer was heard, for though Lapa grew worse, still she could listen to the voice of her daughter exhorting her to bow to God's will, and at the same time praying that she might not die till she submitted. In the ecstasy that this trying scene had precipitated, Catharine heard the voice of Justice saying: "Announce to thy mother, who is unwilling to die at present, that a day will arrive when she will sigh ardently for death, and it will not be granted to her."

On coming out of this vision she was dumbfounded to find that Lapa was dead. Dead without confession, without the sacraments, opposing the will of God! In a torrent of tears the grief-stricken Catharine cried out to Heaven: "O Lord, my God! are these Thy promises —the promises Thou gavest me that none of mine should perish forever? Was not Thy mercy pledged not to withdraw my mother from the world till she was resigned to Thy will? And behold, Father, she is dead without reconciliation to Thee, her guilty soul unshriven! Ah! my blessed Redeemer, suffer not my prayers to thus fall back unheeded. O Jesus, Saviour, who raised the dead by dying Thyself on Calvary! restore to me my mother if but for one fleeting moment, that she may say: 'Thy will be done, O Lord!'" Stooping down to kiss the rigid features of her loved mother, Catharine saw a thin line of red enter the pallid lips, a quivering light stir in the glassy eyes, a troubled movement of the icy body, and found her cry had reached the Throne of Mercy. Lapa was restored to life. Aye, to too long a

life, for, as had been decreeed, she lived to be eighty-nine years, and during which time sustained so many griefs in the loss of those she loved that her constant cry was: "God has riveted my soul to my body so that they cannot separate. How many children and grandchildren I have lost already! It is only I who cannot die. I am left to feel the suffering and death of all the others."

It required years of affliction, privation, and trial to make Lapa realize that God knows best. It was thus He gave a lesson to the world, and a glimpse of His own power, through His servant Catharine.

In 1373 and 1374 an epidemic of the plague broke out in Italy, and made fearful ravages throughout the land, but nowhere raged so generally as at Siena. The disease was so contagious that men, women, and children were equally stricken down, a short time sufficing to end their sufferings in death. Terror filled men's hearts and made them savage, for they left their sick and dying to escape the pestilence; and it fell to the Order of St. Dominic to stretch forth the hand of charity in the self-sacrificing work of attending the sick. Among the Brethren of the Convent of St. Mary of Mercy was Father Matthew, at that time Director. He was an ardent admirer of St. Catharine, in whom he found the virtue and grace he strove to copy. One day Father Raymond, Catharine's confessor, was passing on his round of sick calls, and stopped to see the Director, for whom he cherished a warm affection. He met the Brethren emerging from the chapel, bearing in their arms the almost inanimate form of Father

Matthew, who was ghastly white and speechless, and therefore incapable of telling how and where he suffered. He learned from the Brethren that while he was watching with a sick person the night before, he was stricken with the fearful disease, and in a short time became unable to move. Following him to his room, Father Raymond waited till a little repose had restored to him his voice, then bending over him he heard his confession and gave him absolution. He described the pain in his head as a feeling as though it were breaking in four parts. He was in a high fever when the doctor came, and from him it was learned that every symptom announced the quick approach of death; that at most it was only the question of a very short time. "However," he said, "we will do all we can to-night, but I have no hope for his recovery." Heavy at heart, Father Thomas withdrew, praying God if, in His wisdom it were best, to spare the good Friar yet a while to direct the others in the ways of virtue, forbearance, and love.

Catharine had been made aware of Father Matthew's desperate condition, and entertaining for him affection and the highest esteem, lost no time in reaching the convent where he lay. Entering the room, she cried out, "Arise, Father Matthew. This is not the moment to repose indolently in your bed." At once the fever left him, the scales of disease fell from his body, the pain ceased, and restored to perfect health by the Holy Spirit acting through His handmaid, Father Matthew arose joyfully, and went at once to the altar to give

thanks to God and praise Him for the power given His servant Catharine.

Catharine modestly departed almost immediately, but met on the way Father Raymond, who was ignorant of all that had transpired. Stopping her, he said: "Mother, will you allow a person so useful and so dear to die?" Not wishing to have to tell the miracle herself, she evaded his remark by answering: "In what terms do you address me? Am I like God, to deliver a man from death?" When he replied: "Nay, I know your power well, and that you obtain from God whatever you ask with fervor," she bowed her head, and smiling said: "Well, let us take courage; he shall not die this time." Entering the house, he found the happy Friar surrounded by the Brethren, rejoicing at his recovery, in which Father Raymond devoutly joined.

To those unhappy ones who stand without the pale of Catholic belief, let this stand forth an irrefutable demonstration of the will of God acting through an humble servant, to the end that all men seeing might believe; yet hath Our Lord said: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed."

Very near to the House of Mercy mentioned above there dwelt a very pious woman, who, in her profound veneration for Catharine, had accepted not only the habit of the Sisters of Penance of St. Dominic, but practised as nearly as possible the virtues she admired so much in her patron, whose counsel she followed humbly. While she was busy with her little household duties, one day, from some defect in the wretched building she occupied, the entire floor on which she hap-

pened to be gave way, and she was thrown with it into the cellar. Help arrived almost immediately, and after releasing her from the heavy timbers, boards, and stones that had fallen on her, the neighbors lifted her gently in their arms and carried her to a neighboring house. After some time she recovered consciousness, but with it came the excruciating pain consequent to her many injuries, and she lay there unable to move, shrieking with the torture of broken bones and lacerated and bruised flesh.

Catharine went at once, on hearing of the accident to her poor lay Sister, to comfort and console her, and urge her to patience. She found her sufferings were so excessive that she could not listen, and so to solace her a little Catharine commenced to touch the parts of her body that were causing the most grievous pain, to which the patient gratefully submitted. No sooner did Catharine touch one spot than the pain instantly disappeared, and, encouraged by this, she continued until she finished by restoring the woman completely, who remained quiet till those saintly hands ceased their work of charity, when slowly she recovered the use of her limbs. To the physicians and neighbors gathered around she said: "Catharine, Lapa's daughter, has cured me by only touching me." Silent prayers of admiration and praise to the merciful Father arose in the hearts of all present.

While the plague was at its height a hermit, commonly known as "The Saint," was stricken by the deadly pestilence, and lying desperately ill in his solitary cell outside the city. Catharine caused him to be

transferred to the House of Mercy, where she could visit him with her other Sisters of Penance, and where he would have good care. When he was comfortably settled in his new quarters Catharine approached, and said in an undertone to him, "Do not fear. However ill you may become, you will not die this time." To the others she said nothing, even when they requested her to pray for him; and supposing that she knew that he was to die, they were much afflicted at the thought of losing such a holy man, to whom they had become attached. Gradually his symptoms grew worse, and then their hope for his life here gave place to their anxiety for his existence hereafter. Again Catharine whispered to him, "Fear not, you will not die." Though to all around he appeared to be unconscious, yet in the depth of his eyes she saw he had understood and believed her word more firmly than he did death, whose presence was so close to him. Quietly they made arrangements for his speedy interment, that the living might not be exposed to the dangerous contagion longer than was absolutely necessary; but several days passed without any change in his condition, and he lay like one all but dead. On the third day Catharine came to him, and, kneeling at the bedside of the dying monk, clasped her hands in supplication, and raising them to Him whom she could, with her eyes of spiritual purity, plainly see, poured from her soul a silent plea. A holy light illumined her upturned eyes, and seemed to shine around that slender woman's form; then rising from her knees she touched the head of the expiring hermit, saying, in a voice that seemed to come from afar, "I com-

mand you in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ to live. Arise!" With a tremor and a sigh the dying eyes were opened; back to the heart the life-blood rushed again; and the holy man with moving lips and humble heart arose, while the hushed voices of the monks united tremulously in gratitude to God.

It was during this plague that Fr. Raymond, Catharine's confessor, would probably have lost his life but for Catharine's intercession. He, like all Dominican Friars, had vowed to sacrifice his life if necessary for the salvation of souls. So when the plague was at its height he, with the others, all unmindful of the pestilential bodies that enclosed these precious souls, ministered to their wants. Many days and nights of patient, noble work in this choice vineyard of Christ's charity left Fr. Raymond weak from want of food and rest. One night, when Matins called the faithful ones to prayer, Fr. Raymond felt himself too weak to rise, and seeking for the cause found the fatal swellings that marked the victims of the plague. Distressed at this discovery, which might terminate his work when so much was to be done, he longed for morning light to come, and bring with it the holy woman whom he loved so well. But the fever and pains were now seizing him, and fearing further delay the poor Friar dragged himself painfully along till at last he reached Catharine's door. She was not there. Unable to go further he lay upon the floor, while messengers were dispatched in search of her. When she came and saw her revered spiritual father writhing in the grasp of the foul pestilence, her heart went out in pity to him, and torn with grief for

him to whom she revealed her heart's secrets, ecstatic tears welled from her eyes, and in that inexplicable condition of the body her spirit sought the Great Physician. Although the pains in the limbs and the heavy sensation in the stomach threatened an onset of the usual fatal symptoms, yet Fr. Raymond, confident in the supernatural efficacy of Catharine's prayers and power, made no attempt to arouse her, though for nearly two hours she did not move. As the minutes passed he had an odd tingling sensation, as if something were escaping from various parts of his body. As it proceeded a decided improvement in his condition set in, so that when Catharine came out of the ecstasy which her anxiety and affection for her old confessor and the desire to help him had excited, his cure was complete but for a slight feeling of lassitude, which passed away entirely after light repose and partaking of food prepared by Catharine herself. When he awoke she said to him : "Now, father, you can continue to labor for the salvation of souls. Render thanks to the Omnipotent, who has delivered you from this danger." And Fr. Thomas bent his steps towards the chapel to elevate his heart and soul in thanks to his Creator for the wondrous power given to Catharine.

The epidemic having spent its force, the arduous labors of Catharine and her Sisters were brought to an end. Her fame, however, had spread to other parts of the country, and particularly to Pisa, whose citizens joined the Sisters of Penance of a convent there in entreating Catharine to visit them, urging as an inducement the good she could accomplish in rescuing thou-

sands of souls that otherwise might perish. Catharine never liked travelling, but putting her own wishes aside entirely, she consulted, as was her invariable custom in like difficulties, the will of her Divine Master. He appeared to her in a vision soon after, saying: "My name will be glorified and My grace brought to many souls by this journey. Go, My daughter, and forget not the promise I made thee when for a brief space thou wert with Me."

Obedient to His will, Catharine gathered a few companions about her, and with her confessor and several fathers of the Order to hear confessions, took her departure for Pisa. Arrangements had been made for her reception at the house of Girard Buonconti, a very devout Catholic citizen, where she at once took up the mission God had given to her.

One of the first to profit by the presence of Catharine in the city was a young man of twenty, who came with her host to request Catharine to obtain for him, through her prayers, a restoration to health. He said he had suffered from fevers for eighteen months, and though not so violent then, yet they had wrecked his constitution. Indeed his emaciated, wan features and body only too well told the story. Greatly touched by his pathetic appearance and apparent need, Catharine inquired how long it had been since he had confessed. With hanging head he answered, "Several years." "My friend," she said to him, "God has sent you this affliction evidently on account of your neglect of the Sacrament of Penance. Go, therefore, my brother, confess your sins, and cleanse your soul from the foul poison

that has so long encrusted it, and corrupted your body." Sending for Fr. Thomas, she confided the suffering youth to him. When he had lifted from his soul the burden of guilt that helped to weigh his body down, and received from Fr. Thomas absolution, he returned to Catharine, who received him with a face full of the holy joy that all such victories gave her. Placing her hand lightly on his head as he bowed it for her blessing, she said: "Go, my son, with the peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It is His will that this fever leave you forever. Go, and never depart from Him again." From that time the young man's health was restored, as was attested by a visit he made many days afterward, to thank Catharine again for the wonderful change she had produced in him through God's love.

When his Holiness, Pope Gregory XI., leaving Avignon to return again to the Eternal City, passed through Genoa, Catharine was waiting there to meet him. Accompanying her at the time were two very devout young men who were preparing themselves for admission to a religious Order by serving the Friars Preachers travelling with her. One was called Neri de Landoccio, who found his duty in despising the vanities of the world and meditating in solitude; the other was Stephen Corrade, who, eventually following Catharine's dying admonition, entered the Order of Carthusians, in which he shone for his piety and intelligence, having been elected Prior of several monasteries.

While awaiting the arrival of the Sovereign Pontiff, Neri was taken suddenly ill of an obscure inflammation, the pain of which precluded the possibility of his

resting quietly in bed or of walking about. Seeking relief from the pain that tormented him, Neri crawled around, seeking by changing his position to ease his sufferings. This only increased the inflammation, until finally, unable to longer endure the torture, physicians were summoned, who, finding on examination that he was in a precarious state, left some directions with medicine, saying that he could not live.

When Stephen, his companion, heard this sad intelligence, he hurried to Catharine, and throwing himself at her feet, implored her to have compassion on his comrade and use the power of her intercession with the heavenly Father and save him, who had journeyed so far serving her and God, from dying away from home and being buried in a strange land. Deeply affected by the anguish and tears of the young man, Catharine responded gently: "Why do you allow yourself to be troubled, my son? If God in His wisdom wishes to recompense your brother Neri's labors, you should not be afflicted, but on the contrary rejoice." But the voice of the grief in his heart was all he heard, and casting himself again on his knees, from which she had gently raised him, he cried in pitying tones: "O dearest, kindest mother, I conjure you hear my prayer, and help my brother. Do not deny me that favor. I am convinced he will be saved if you but intercede for him." "My poor child, I did but exhort you to bow to the will of God. But I see that your heart is breaking; and tomorrow morning at Mass, if you will remind me of your request, I promise to pray to God for that intention.

But you must add your prayers to mine at the same time."

Overjoyed at his success, Stephen withdrew. Long before the appointed time he was at the church, awaiting in prayerful suspense the commencement of the Mass and the appearance of Catharine. When at last the holy Catharine approached the altar to receive the Sacred Host, Stephen, humbly kneeling near her, whispered, "Mother, thy promise, I entreat you." Sinking into a corner he awaited with bated breath the revelation being made to Catharine, who, as usual on receiving the precious Body and Blood of Our Saviour, remained in an ecstasy. When at last her wandering spirit sought again its envelope of clay, Stephen lifted his eyes and saw that she was smiling on him. "You have obtained the grace you asked," she said, as he knelt at her feet. "Mother, will Neri be cured?" he cried. "Yes, assuredly he will be saved, for God desires to restore him to us." Flying to his companions, Stephen spread the happy news. Again they summoned the physicians, who were astounded to find their patient much improved, and in a few days he had completely recovered.

Hardly had Neri recovered, when Stephen, worn out by anxiety, watching, and exposure, was stricken down by a violent fever, that racked his brain and set his blood on fire as it were. His companions gathered around him, as he was greatly loved, to cheer and console him. Catharine was soon informed of his condition and at once went to his relief. After questioning him to find out the nature of his malady, and finding

it was as reported—a violent fever, she took him by the hand, then bending low her head in silent supplication to the Redeemer to show His love through her, she pronounced these words: "I command this fever to depart!" Straightway the bounding pulse resumed its wonted measure, the throbbing temples ceased to rack the brain, and with a wondering look upon his face Stephen arose to find that Catharine had returned to her narrow room to render to God the praises that were due to Him.

Another marvellous cure obtained by Catharine was when she was for a time at Florence, where she had been sent by Pope Gregory XI., after his return to Rome, in order to bring about a reconciliation between the Holy Father and His erring children. Although there were the mutterings of a storm of sedition against the Holy See, and her friends and companions advised her to withdraw until it should pass, still she remained till peace was assured. Preparing then to leave, it was found that one of the Sisters of Penance accompanying her, named Jane, was unable to be moved on account of one of her feet, which was very much swollen and inflamed, and which gave rise to high fever. Not willing to leave her behind, Catharine turned to her faithful Friend in all emergencies, and implored Him to make it possible for them to resume their journey by relieving Jane of her disability. Even while she was thus absorbed in earnestly invoking Divine assistance the sufferer fell into a gentle slumber, from which she awoke after several hours, with no trace of her painful malady. With wondering heads and devout hearts

her companions humbly knelt, chastened in their souls to think that God is so near.

About this time Catharine passed through Toulon, and although unannounced, yet it soon spread through the city that the holy saint was with them, and crowds began to flock to the inn where she was resting. One woman, among the many who received her blessing, brought to her an infant so swollen with disease as to be repulsive. Overcome by compassion for the suffering mite of humanity, Catharine took the infant in her arms a moment, while her heart sought its Creator. Hardly a moment it seemed, yet the little one began at once to change, and presently assumed a healthy hue and size, laughing and crowing on its mother's bosom. What wonder is it that He who made the stars that sweep along in their appointed places should lift a burden from one of His tiny atoms by a word of faith in a woman's heart!

CHAPTER XIX.

CATHARINE CASTS OUT EVIL SPIRITS.

CATHARINE from her earliest youth had been engaged in combat with the enemy of God, but by her manner of life, in breaking down and destroying every softening influence that could afford him a lurking-place, she rendered her soul so pure in the sight of God, that never once did Satan's cloven foot leave its stain there. It was not strange that she, who had overcome and subjugated so completely the evil one, who had tried to find admission to her own virgin soul, should be equally powerful in driving him from those in which for a time he was allowed to revel. All that Catharine did, whether in working out her own salvation or that of others, keeping the devil from entering and destroying her own heart or driving him out and repairing his evil in another's, curing the sick or raising the dead, she did in the name of the Saviour, and through the power of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the course of her work of charity at Siena this new faculty was made known to Catharine. It caused her great distress of mind before she recognized that evidently it was the will of the Father that such things should occur, as another evidence that all should turn

to Him for consolation and support, no matter what the care or trial.

There was an old notary at Siena, who being of a very devout turn of mind, and having accumulated a considerable sum of money, more than sufficient for his own needs, resolved, with his wife's consent, to devote himself, with her, for the rest of their lives, to the service to God. He first consecrated his two daughters to Him, placing them with a religious Order in the city, to which he gave his entire fortune, retaining only sufficient for the support of himself and his wife in a little cottage adjacent to the monastery, the temporal affairs of which were placed in his care.

The current of their lives ran smoothly for a long time; then the inscrutable wisdom of God decreed his servant a severe trial, for which these days of holy peace had been but the preparation. One of his daughters, the youngest, aged about six, began to exhibit signs of having become possessed by an evil spirit. So strange and precocious were her words and acts that the holy nuns felt the peace of the monastery to be in danger, for they knew not what moment a more violent outbreak of the evil spirit might occur. She went about uttering strange cries, and speaking in unknown tongues, principally Latin, of which she had not the slightest knowledge, proclaiming the sins and secrets of those about her with startling accuracy. Her language was exalted, and her answers to all questions, however difficult, were extraordinary. There seemed to be no evidence of insanity or ill-health, as her conversation was rational. Under the circumstances the nuns were

compelled to return her to her father's care It was evident that the evil spirit was allowed possession of this innocent child for the same reason that trials or tribulations are sent to us—that we, though feeble and powerless of ourselves, might move mountains such as these by faith in God.

In dire distress at an affliction that seemed to threaten the very soul of this white lily, that had been set aside for His glory, the parents sought every means of restoring their child. They had great faith in the intercession of the Blessed Ambrose of the Order of Preaching Friars of St. Dominic, who while on earth spread the glory of his divine Master by the multitude of his miracles, especially in cases such as this. The cope and scapular he had worn being still in the possession of the Brethren, and having proved efficacious in delivering others possessed, little Laurencia, as she was called, was taken to the monastry and placed on the tomb of Blessed Ambrose, with the cope about her, while the prayers of the parents invoked the aid of the holy saint. Evidently God had other designs than the mere affliction of a child or its parents, neither of which had ever deeply offended Him; and this was soon demonstrated. St. Ambrose was not permitted to exercise his intercession, in order that a sister star of his Order still on earth, might rise like him in the firmament of God's love, shining with the glorious power reflected from the Saviour. Catharine's aid was sought, but her humility would not permit her to even attempt a cure, for she said to them: "Alas ! I am myself daily tormented by demons. How do you imagine that I can

deliver others from them?" In order that she might not further distress the parents, whom she did not feel that she could aid, Catharine retired to her cell, where she was free from further importunities. Her very refusal seemed to inspire the child's parents with greater confidence in Catharine's power, for they sought the intercession of Fr. Thomas, at that time Catharine's confessor, entreating him to use his authority in their behalf, and insist in the name of the obedience due him that she help them. Feeling a very deep sympathy for the afflicted parents, who, he could see, were almost broken-hearted, but knowing that his authority could not oblige Catharine to perform miracles, Fr. Thomas had recourse to an expedient. While Catharine was absent, he led the little child to the oratory near her cell, where he left her in charge of one of the Sisters, saying: "Tell Catharine, when she returns, that in virtue of holy obedience she will allow this child to remain here near her during the coming night." When Catharine returned she found the little Laurencia waiting there. Seeing that the child was possessed, and suspecting that it was the one she had been asked to cure, Catharine questioned her companion and was told of her confessor's admonition. Unable longer to refuse to do what humility alone had held her from, Catharine drew the little one to her, and gently forcing her to kneel beside her, began the battle with the demon. The night wore on, and the distant stars looked down upon the two forms kneeling there, the one silently pleading with their Creator, the other in the convulsive grasp of a half-vanquished demon; until the glorious light of day

burst in upon their vigil, bringing with it the fulfilment of the Redeemer's promise, "Ask, and ye shall receive." Little Laurencia was again free.

It had been the intention of the good parents, after testifying their gratitude to God for the deliverance, by many works of charity, to return to their habitation, taking the child with them; but Catharine, foreseeing what was to befall in the future, said to them: "Leave the child with me for a few days; it is necessary for her complete restoration." Taking her in charge, Catharine uprooted and destroyed the last vestige of the demon's presence by teaching the child by word and example to spend her whole time in prayer. She would not permit her leaving the house until the appointed time. One day Catharine was compelled to leave the child in charge of a servant, while she was absent with Sister Alessia on some mission of charity. It was nearly night, when Catharine suddenly called to Alessia to hasten with her to the house, saying: "The infernal wolf has caught the lamb we saved." When she reached Laurencia they found the poor child furious with excitement: "Ah! serpent," Catharine cried, "thou hast dared to enter again into that innocent child; but I have faith in Jesus, my Saviour and Spouse. Depart, foul fiend, and return no more!" Seizing the child, she carried her to the oratory, where she had been restored, and there before the altar of the Lamb she consecrated again the rescued child to God. Returning with her to her anxious parents, she said to them, "Now take your child in all security. She will never be tormented again." The happy parents saw their child,

years afterwards, Sister Laurencia, a peaceful, holy nun.

Another instance of this means of exercising the faith that burned in Catharine's soul occurred near the house of a noble and wealthy lady with whom Catharine was staying, one of whose tenants, a very worthy woman, was suddenly seized and acted like one possessed. The lady, hearing of the misfortune that had befallen her tenant, took compassion on her, and knowing Catharine's humility, and the horror she had of approaching people possessed,—for she had her own battles to fight against these enemies of God,—sought to excite her charity by presenting the possessed woman to her, that her sufferings alone might plead for her intercession. Catharine's heart was touched, and placing both her hands upon the sufferer's head she breathed a silent prayer for mercy to Him who taught us how to pray. Then lifting up her voice, she cried: "Go forth, thou vile, tormenting demon, and leave in peace forever this creature redeemed by Jesus Christ." As she spoke a peaceful slumber stole over the victim's tortured body, and in her soul His image shone once more.

CHAPTER XX.

CATHARINE'S GIFT OF PROPHECY.

THE great Creator has manifested His power in the works of the creation; but through man alone does He make Himself manifest. He planted in the human heart the germ of the truth of His existence, that it might perfect and beautify man's life, and teach him something of his future state. By constant watchful care and eternal vigilance this potent germ expands throughout the soul and mind, diffusing to the faculties such an acuteness of perception, and knowledge of the wisdom of the Almighty, that the little acts and thoughts of men stand forth to such an one as clearly as the dew-drop on the lily-bloom, or a blot upon a virgin page. And so it was with Catharine: the long preparation-time was bearing now rich fruit, and Catharine, like unto her chosen Spouse, "went about her Father's business."

Among the countless number of conversions brought about directly by Catharine's influence were many who would never have been moved to turn to God, but for the fact that His knowledge of their evil ways was forcibly presented to them when this His handmaid held up to them their inmost, secret, sins.

Notable in this army of converts was one who all his

life had fought for chivalry and fame, the famous Nicholas of the Saracens, surnamed "my lord" by all the country round. Returning from the wars, he resolved to spend the remainder of his days in ease and the enjoyment of his ample fortune. During his absence the hearts of all his womenfolk were faithful in petitioning for the safety of the body of their lord; and now that all danger from that source had ceased, they sought to bring about his soul's salvation as well, by urging him to make a general confession of all the sins that filled his soldier life, and in the peace and solitude of home do penance for the rest of his declining years. Thoroughly imbued with all the worldly notions that a selfish life entails, and confident that the strength so long accorded him would not fail him now, he laughed at their entreaties and derided their concern.

Baffled in their efforts by the obstinacy of the old lord, they thought of Catharine, who had become famous for her remarkable conversions of many hardened sinners, and asked the knight if he would go with them to see her. "What have I to do with that good woman?" he good-naturedly replied. "Pray, what service could she render me?" His wife in despair finally went to Catharine, to whom she was greatly attached, and, explaining to her the difficulties in the way of her husband's conversion, begged her to pray God to soften his heart, that he might make his peace with Him.

Not long after this the knight had a vivid dream, in which the holy Catharine appeared to him arrayed

in angelic attire, and warned him that if he did not heed his wife's advice his blackened soul would be damned for all eternity. Next morning he said to his lady: "I had a strange dream last night, and saw in it *that* Catharine of whom you speak so often to me. I would like to have an interview with her, and see if she really looks as she appeared to me." Overjoyed at his resolution, she urged immediately that they should not delay the visit, but call on her at once.

They found St. Catharine in her little cell, kneeling at her devotions. When at last she rose, and, turning to her visitors, bade them welcome, the knight stood still in mute surprise; the face and form of the vision stood before him, and on his ears the selfsame tender voice of warning fell.

Beckoning him to enter, she with a motion bade the wife retire. She spoke to him of God and all his wonders; of His inexorable laws and justice; of His wisdom, and the immeasurable depth of His love that gave His only beloved Son to years of suffering and a cruel death, yearning that the hearts of men might turn to Him in love, and that their souls, washed by His blood from stain of mortal sin, might find with Him eternal rest above.

As the words of warning and of wisdom fell in measured tones on the listening heart of the knight, his proud head bent in meek subjection to the sword of Truth, that, striking head and heart, raised him to the knighthood of God's love.

Thoughtfully the knight took his way home, and for many days remained invisible to his boon com-

panions. But the leaven of truth planted in his heart by Catharine's words was actively at work, and created within him a craving for a better knowledge of God. As this could only be accomplished by purifying the soul of all its black iniquity, he sought the sacred precincts of the confessional, and learned in Penance the first lesson of God's love. Then going straight to Catharine, whom he found at the church of the Friar Preachers, he drew her to one side with profound respect, saying: "Madam, I have done what your words urged me to do the other day; I have confessed all my sins to Fr. Thomas, and have received absolution, and go now to perform my penance." To which she replied: "Sir Nicholas, you have acted wisely for your soul's salvation; now avoid all your former practices, and fight as valiantly for love of Jesus Christ as you have done for hope of worldly fame." Then looking at him intently a moment, she resumed: "My lord, have you confessed all your sins?" He assured her that he had forgotten none, but she still insisted: "Examine well and see if you have not omitted something." He reiterated his former statement, that none had escaped his memory. Leaving him alone a few moments, she admonished him to examine well his conscience and see if he had not forgotten some sin. When she returned he still maintained that he had mentioned all his sins. Then she motioned him aside, and in his lowered ear whispered a grievous sin committed years before in Apulia. Astounded at the accuracy of what only he himself had knowledge, he admitted that Catharine was right, and going at once

in search of his confessor, he perfected his confession. This instance of Catharine's power so affected him that he could not conceal the fact, but published it broadcast, calling attention to the saint and prophetess among them. Ever after the good knight remained faithful to his new vows ; and the wisdom and mercy of divine Providence was shown to all, for within the year his chastened soul had winged its flight to God.

Another striking instance of the Divine gift vouchsafed Catharine occurred at Montepulciano. On account of being far from a convent of the Friars, the spiritual Director of a community of nuns located there was very glad to welcome any travelling Religious who happened that way, inasmuch as, with only one companion to relieve him, he often felt the need of the spiritual consolations of others, especially of those Dominicans for whom he had a warm friendship.

It happened that Fr. Thomas, the now well-known confessor of Catharine, with Fr. Naddo, another Dominican, were passing the day with him ; and as Catharine required the almost constant attendance of her confessor in her works of charity, they were compelled to return early. In order to be more expeditious they accepted the loan of two horses. Arriving at a place about six miles from their destination, they halted at an inviting spot to rest a few moments from their unusual exercise. This was, as it turned out afterward, very imprudent, for the inhabitants, while not professional thieves, yet had no compunction, if they saw an opportunity, in waylaying and robbing unprotected

travellers, and, if in danger of discovery, murdering them outright.

Observing that the two Religious were alone and unarmed, some ten or twelve of them hid near the solitary road along which the Friars had to pass. When the latter passed by engaged in earnest conversation, totally unsuspicious of any possible harm, the peasants sprang on them with swords and lances, and, dragging them from their horses, hurried them along to the depths of the forest, where they could rob them at leisure and at the same time determine their fate.

The two Religious could see that their lives were in danger ; and Fr. Thomas especially did not hesitate to plead for mercy, promising not to make known the robbery if they were allowed to depart. When he saw that they were being taken to still deeper parts of the wild forest, he realized that only God could deliver them from their imminent danger, and turned his earnest thoughts to Him ; and knowing how exalted Catharine was in the grace of God, he invoked her intercession in a silent prayer, saying : " O Catharine, meek and devoted servant of God, help us in this peril."

Far away, amid the noise and bustle of the crowded city, the words were echoed in the heart of the faithful servant of the Lord. For, in the midst of her occupation at that moment, she turned to her companion, saying : " My father confessor is calling me ; I know that he is in great danger." Then going immediately to her little shrine, she prayed fervently to the great Defender to watch over the holy Friar, and bring him safely through the peril.

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Scarcely had she finished, when the one who was conducting Fr. Thomas, and who seemed, by reason of his ferocious aspect and surly silence, their appointed executioner, stopped suddenly, and, wheeling around, said to his companions: "Why should we kill these poor Friars? They never did any one any harm. It would be a shameful crime. Let us allow them to go in peace; they are good men, and have promised not to betray us." To the great astonishment of the anxious Friars, all the rest agreed to this with one accord, and seemed glad to be rid of an unpleasant duty; for they not only restored to the poor monks the horses they had taken, but also their clothes, retaining only a little money.

Thus did Catharine use her potent gifts. Whether to save a soul from everlasting torment, or a body from present danger, it was always to the honor and glory of God. If her powerful intercession met with such a ready response while she was with us, how infinitely more so must it be now, when in the presence continually of Him from whom all good gifts flow!

A remarkable instance of this wonderful gift in Catharine was shown during the time of the revolt against Pope Gregory XI. The intelligence of the defection of Perugia was brought by Catharine's confessor, who related to her how grieved he was at heart to learn that so many had become blinded by their own folly as to cast aside their only source of truth and faith, the Church, and, despising the fearful penalties of excommunication, rush headlong to destruction. Catharine condoled with him a while, de-

ploring the awful havoc Satan was making in the precious souls that hitherto had been faithful. But presently she spoke in prophecy, saying: "Be not hasty in shedding tears; worse things are coming to excite your lamentations. What you mourn for now is milk and honey compared to what is to follow." Aroused by these solemn words of warning Fr. Raymond asked: "Mother, can it be possible that we will witness greater misfortunes than seeing Christians lose all love and respect for the Church God founded, and, careless of her censures, openly glorying in their separation? Why, the next thing to that would be"—and here the words trembled on the holy Friar's lip as he whispered—"to deny Our Lord Himself." The warning tones of prophecy continued in her reply: "Now only laymen are acting thus; but presently this foul contamination will spread, and, striking the clergy, will seek to drag down the weaker ones. And when the holy vicar of Christ will try to purge them of this moral pestilence, they will rise against him who seeks to lift them up, and rend and ravage the Church of God, like so many blaspheming infidels or heretics. They will not attempt to create a new creed, but a new Church with themselves as heads, and thus divide Christendom with Christ."

That this was not simply a natural outcome of the circumstances presented to her at the time was demonstrated very plainly to her confessor. He thought that all this would occur during the life of Pope Gregory XI. Such was not the case. Gregory XI. died, and it was only after Urban VI. succeeded him in St. Peter's

chair that Catharine's prophecy of the schism was verified. When she was summoned to Rome at the commencement of the schism, she said to Fr. Raymond : " I declare to you now that what is taking place at present here is child's play in comparison to what will occur in the neighboring territories." By this she meant Sicily and the Roman provinces ; and later developments demonstrated the accuracy of her prediction. During the reign of Queen Jane in those provinces, fearful desolation and ruin fell on her and on her kingdom.

Speaking of the more remote future, she predicted that : " After these tribulations and trials have passed, God will drive out the seditious poison, and set at rest the holy Church, by means known only to Himself. So far-reaching will these changes be that all the torn and gaping wounds that now disfigure God's spouse, the Holy Mother Church, will be healed, and she will stand again before the world in all the glory of her virgin purity, strong, calm, divine; as enduring as the words Christ uttered when He gave her to the world : ' Thou art Peter : upon this rock I build My church.' And infidels and apostates, seeing the truth again revealed in all her holy mysteries, and the envious ones who sought to destroy God's Vicar swept away by the whirlwind of His wrath, will return to her as do lost and wandering sheep unto the fold, ever after to raise their eyes in mute wondering love and obedience to the Shepherd watching there."

Through some great misapprehension of the facts, Catharine has been accused of having predicted a gen-

eral crusade of Christians to the Holy Land, which she and her disciples were to follow. Such was not the case. It had been the wish nearest her heart that Christ should rule the world, and she bent all her energies to this one end. In fact her journey to Avignon to confer with His Holiness Pope Gregory XI. was with this object in view. In the course of the interview accorded to her the Sovereign Pontiff said : " First of all, peace must be established among Christians, and then we might organize a crusade."

Catharine, replying, said : " Holy Father, there is no better means for re-establishing peace among Christians than the undertaking of a crusade. All the turbulent soldiers who now maintain division among the faithful will cease and go cheerfully to combat in the holy cause. Very few will refuse to serve God in the profession that pleases them ; and it will thereby become a means of expiation for their offences. The fire will thus be extinguished for want of fuel. You will thus, Holy Father, accomplish several very desirable things at once : you will bestow peace on many Christians who require it, and you will save others from becoming great culprits, by removing them to other scenes of action ; and, whether you win or lose, many of the infidel Saracens may be converted."

In all of this there was no prediction, but only earnest longing ; she agitated the subject often, but never set a time for action, resigning everything to the wisdom of divine Providence. Her constant prayer was that the love of God might so spread on the face of the world as to bring to all men eternal life above.

The fulfilment of Catharine's predictions in the face of what at the time appeared insurmountable obstacles was strikingly illustrated in the case of a very dissolute young man who was brought to her. Having lost both his parents when quite young, he had not had the benefit of the controlling influence of a mother's love, nor the judicious guidance of a father's experience, in forming his character. Left to himself, he had acquired, though of good family, a taste for low company and vicious practices. He married a comely young girl whose influence and character should have been sufficient to keep him from indulging his corrupt practices and wicked inclinations, but he seemed incapable of breaking off his life of dissipation. After having conversed with the holy Catharine, whose lessons and admonitions made a deep impression on him, he would moderate a good deal his wretched conduct; but it was not a lasting grace, as he would gradually drift back to his old habits, especially gambling, of which he was particularly fond.

Although his continual defections grieved Catharine, who prayed continually for his regeneration and salvation, yet she was not greatly disturbed by them; for, with the eyes of purity and the wisdom of prophecy, she was enabled to see into the future, where she beheld what gave her great consolation. She revealed it to this wild youth in these words: "You come to me frequently for pity and advice, then like an untamed bird you return soon to your wild flights. But fly away as you may, the time will come when God will throw

a noose around your neck which ever after will keep you close to Him." Catharine never lived to see the fulfilment of her prophecy. Though Francis, as he was named, relapsed into his former dissipation, without the saintly woman to hold him back from time to time, yet she accomplished after her death what in life her words had failed of doing. When affliction's hand was laid heavily on him, and he left his loose companions to carry his sweet young wife to an early grave, the spirit of the holy saint came to him in these hours of desolation and despair. It led him through repentance to throw off his cloak of sin, and put on the monk's garb of poverty and penance, to find among the Brethren of the Order of Olivetans peace, and enjoy still more the patronage of St. Catharine.

No better example of Catharine's penetrating insight into the spiritual needs of others, and the prophetic spirit that guided and gave form and substance to all her counsels, could be given than that furnished by the result of a visit she was induced to make to a Carthusian monastery. Fr. Bartholomew of Ravenna, who was at the time Prior of this monastery, which was situated on a little island about thirty miles from Leghorn, held Catharine in the highest esteem, and sought with great humility the edification of her instructions whenever the opportunity offered. She complied with his entreaties to come and leave with the Brethren the blessing that God's grace had made so potent. Arrived at the island, Catharine was received at the house of a pious inhabitant, located about a

mile from the monastery. The following day the prior led his whole community before Catharine, and begged that she add to her blessing a few consoling words of encouragement. At first she declined, on account, as she said, of her incapacity, ignorance, and sex; and further, that it was more becoming to her to listen to God's servants than to speak to them. Yielding finally to the earnest solicitations of the good Prior, she began to speak to them of the most efficient means of overcoming the numerous temptations and illusions which the lost angel knows so well how to present to souls that in solitude and silence seek the Blessed Master. And as she continued, the intelligence of the Holy Ghost inspired her, and her words brought consolation and conviction to every Brother there; for in a convent as in the world doubt and indecision are the two narrow portals through which the enemy often finds admission for his hordes of restless demons of destruction.

When she ceased, the Prior turned to Fr. Raymond, at that time her confessor, and said to him: "Dear Brother, had the saintly Catharine been acquainted with the faults, failings, and defects of each of these Religious, who confess to me alone, she could not have ministered more completely to their spiritual needs. The Divine gift of prophecy is hers, and also divination; for not alone has she touched on their present failings, but has taught them how to meet those to come."

From his reverence for these wondrous gifts arose the friendship of His Holiness Pope Gregory XI. for

Catharine. When he was declared successor to St. Peter, the Holy See was at Avignon. Catharine went to him at that time, and, being admitted to his presence, said, "Holy Father, I have come to remind thee of the secret vow thou didst offer to God, that, if it pleased Him to make thee His Vicar, thou wouldst remove the Holy See again to near St. Peter's tomb, in the Eternal City." Amazed, the Supreme Pontiff gazed on the holy maid to whom had been revealed a vow that only God had heard. He raised his hand in silent blessing on the wondrous handmaid of the Lord, then, deep in thought, retired to prepare at once for the fulfilment of the secret promise.

This gift of prophecy, this power of seeing men's souls and minds, and whither they were drifting, gave Catharine the opportunities for exercising those other talents that were entrusted to her care, and for which she made return thousands of times over, in conducting safely the multitude of souls that otherwise would have fallen, beyond recall, into the awful chasm of eternal wrath.

CHAPTER XXI.

CATHARINE'S MIRACULOUS POWER OVER INANIMATE THINGS.

In all Catharine's thoughts and words and deeds there was a profound, soul-shaking earnestness which irrepressibly took the form and substance of a prayer. As she sought only the glorification of the Blessed Redeemer, they arose as incense to the throne of God, and, finding favor in His eyes, were answered even as the holy saint desired. Her work was heavenly work, and could be accomplished only by celestial means. When, in the course of her labors of charity, the purely physical means necessary for attaining her desired end were beyond her strength, or wanting entirely, then, as in all the difficulties and obstacles with which her pathway to Heaven was thickly strewn, it was that the Blessed Master's hand appeared, to bring about in supernatural ways what Catharine's slender hands alone could not accomplish.

At one time there was a great scarcity of grain in Siena, and many of the poorer people were compelled to purchase only what had been spoiled by moisture and age. Catharine was with her bosom friend Alessia, a young widow who was so devotedly attached to her, and had sacrificed so much to be near her, and who was

altogether of such an admirable character and soft, sweet disposition, that her affection had been reciprocated by Catharine, and they were inseparable companions. Alessia suffered, as did the rest of God's poor; but finally the harvest-time came again, and yielded the new grain in abundance. Alessia purchased a supply of the fresh grain, and was about to throw away what remained of the old, when Catharine restrained her, saying: "Why throw away what God has given for man's sustenance? If you do not like to eat of that bread, distribute it to the poor who have none." Alessia replied that she scrupled giving bread made from poor flour, preferring to give them what was made from the new. "Wait," said Catharine. "Prepare the water, and bring here the flour that you were about to throw away. I will make loaves of it myself and give them to the poor in the name of Jesus Christ."

Taking the spoiled flour and the water, Catharine formed the usual dough of it, which she divided into loaves to be baked. As she worked, the number of loaves increased out of all proportion to the amount of flour used; so much so that Alessia and the servants looked on in blank amazement. At least four or five times the usual number of loaves were prepared from this flour. When it was baked and tasted it was found to be far superior to any that they had ever eaten before. These loaves were collected and placed in a sort of pantry, from whence they were drawn to be distributed to the poor, who as yet could not buy the new flour. Daily it was given freely, but the supply miraculously continued, and only at the end of several

weeks, when the new wheat was cheap enough for all, did the multiplication cease.

Fr. Thomas, Catharine's confessor, summoned several of the learned Religious to show them this wonder; and then seeking Catharine, he interrogated her closely about this prodigy. She told him: "Father, I experienced an ardent desire to feed the poor, and felt grieved to think of throwing away what would be of help to them; and having this earnest wish in my heart, I went to where the flour was kept. When I reached it I saw a vision of the Blessed Virgin, surrounded by saints and angels, who seemed to smile on my fervent wish and helplessness, for she indicated to me, while I was kneading the dough, her desire to assist me; and thus it passed through her sacred hands, to which is due the excellence of the quality, and the multiplication of the loaves. 'O Mother, glorious Queen,' I exclaimed, 'it is through thee God has deigned to assist and bless my feeble efforts to give bread to the poor, as it was through thee He came to men, to leave with them the Bread of Life eternal!'"

Not once only did this miraculous multiplication of bread occur, but several times during Catharine's life. Thus, on one occasion, Catharine visited Rome at the request of His Holiness Pope Urban VI. Many of her disciples and spiritual children followed her on this journey, some to visit the holy places in Rome, others to receive the papal benediction, but the greater number to enjoy her instructive conversation. Having neither money nor income, she had to beg for the support of herself and those of her companions

who choose to lodge with her. Catharine was installed in a house not far from the column of Antonius, where she established an economical system of housekeeping. Each week one of her associates took complete charge of all the domestic arrangements, thereby leaving the others free to fulfil the different pious objects for which they had come to Rome. All the bread consumed in the house was obtained by mendicant Religious, who begged it from the people ; and in order that there might always be a sufficient quantity in the house for their immediate needs, Catharine directed the Sister in charge to give her at least one day's notice before the supply would be exhausted, in order that she might send out some one or go herself in quest of it. One evening it was found that Sister Jane had, in the round of her many duties, overlooked the supply of bread, and as the evening meal was about to be eaten she went to Catharine in great distress and embarrassment and acknowledged her neglect. "Ah, Sister, may the Lord forgive you for having reduced so many to hunger through your neglect ! Now the whole community are expecting to eat, and it is too late to procure bread." Poor Jane showed great grief for her fault, and begged a severe penance for her negligence.

"Go," said Catharine, "and tell the servants of God to take their places at table." When Jane brought to her attention again the fact that there was only a small amount of bread left, she answered : "Tell them to commence with what little there is, and wait till God relieves their necessities." Then she sought Him in prayer.

When the community was seated and the scanty supply of bread brought out, the poor hungry Religious found that their portion would be very small when divided. Nevertheless they began eating, when, to their astonishment, the heap of bread seemed never to diminish notwithstanding the many that were drawing from it. When the repast was finished, enough remained to supply all those serving, as well as a generous amount to be distributed to the poor. Catharine was sought in order to explain the miracle. They found her in her cell, absorbed in silent prayer.

A very similar affair occurred after Catharine's death, when her relics were being transported to Siena.

Too numerous to mention are the miracles performed by the direct or indirect influence of Catharine; but among the most astounding are those which occurred when she was at Pisa. As usual Catharine and her followers were lodged with a devout Catholic, where she had complete solitude when necessary. Here, as elsewhere, her ecstasies continued, and brought forth much valuable instruction for her spiritual children. Her body, however, would show such signs of weakness that often her confessor and intimates feared for her life. The owner of the house, one Girard Buoniconti, sought some remedy against the fainting attacks to which Catharine was subject from time to time. Remembering having seen similar cases treated by bathing the temples and wrists with a certain wine called Vernaccia, Fr. Raymond and Girard resolved to try it. Inasmuch as Catharine could not be induced to take any form of stimulant internally, Girard went to a neighbor who he

knew had some of this wine, and asked for a bottle of it, describing the urgent need that Catharine had of it. "My friend," said the neighbor, "I would very willingly give you a cask of that wine, but it has been completely empty for three months. I am very sorry; you can come with me, and I will show you." With that he conducted him to the wine-cellar, and going to the cask that had held the wine he opened the spigot, in order to prove his words, when, to the utter amazement of both, a beautiful, clear wine flowed out abundantly. Closing the outlet, the astonished owner called his household before him and demanded who had put wine into the cask. They declared that it was impossible to have put new wine into it, as none had been purchased by him. These startling facts soon spread, and people began to talk of the wonderful miracle.

Catharine's spiritual family, though familiar with these things, for they saw that Catharine's very life was sustained often in a miraculous manner, were greatly moved to learn that such a prodigy had been effected simply by Catharine's presence and needs.

Catharine, having recovered somewhat from this attack of feebleness, set out one day to visit the Papal Nuncio at Pisa. As she went along she heard the people who crowded in her footsteps crying: "Behold one who does not drink wine, yet who has filled an empty cask with miraculous wine!" Overcome by shame at this demonstration, Catharine hastened to her cell, where she threw herself before the altar of her affections, crying piteously: "Lord, why dost Thou afflict the heart of Thy lowly servant and render her the sport of every-

body? All Thy servants live at peace among men; let it be so also with me. Who could have solicited this wine on my account? For many years, O my Father, by the help of Thy inspiration, I have not partaken of wine, and now behold it covers me with ridicule. I pray Thee in Thy mercy dry the source of this wine, turn Thy bounty to others more deserving, and put an end to this report and foolish excitement." Although many of the inhabitants had procured quantities of the wine that still flowed so freely, yet suddenly it was changed to a muddy fluid unfit for use, and then ceased altogether.

The two miracles were not without a purpose. In the first was shown that the mere presence of a soul acceptable in the sight of God is capable of being specially favored. The second was but the reward of Catharine's humility, and therefore of her wisdom. For humility in the sight of God is but another word for intense love.

CHAPTER XXII.

CATHARINE'S FREQUENT COMMUNIONS. MIRACLES THAT OCCURRED DURING THEM.

CATHARINE'S devotion to Our Redeemer was never made more perfectly apparent than when she approached Him in the Blessed Sacrament. Then it was that every fibre of her spiritual nature would thrill with anticipation of the exquisite joy of receiving Him to whom she had consecrated her life. When the last solemn sweet tones of the bell announcing the coming of the heavenly Host vibrated on the hushed air, Catharine, ravished with the sense of the infinite Presence there, would lose all consciousness of worldly forms and become, as it were, petrified in the contemplation of Christ, fearful of losing even one second of the glorious privilege accorded her. It was undoubtedly this prolonged condition of ecstatic joy following her reception of the Holy Eucharist that prevented her from communicating daily; and these ecstasies finally became so prolonged as to win for her the privilege of hearing Mass in her own cell, where she would not become an object of criticism.

This is hardly the place to discuss the advisability of frequent communions, for several reasons, princi-

pally when we consider that it is not a question of precept to be regulated by analogy, but an act of purest devotion aroused by the divine Spirit. It is not a body going through a mechanical form, but an immortal soul craving for the presence of the Saviour. There can be no greater privilege accorded to a soul during this fleeting, finite life than a participation in the mysteries of its own redemption. Nothing so expands the mind of man as the contemplation of the wisdom of God; so there is no more perfect way of loving the Creator than by worthily acknowledging the sacrifice of His beloved Son.

The opinion of the greatest master of theology the world has ever known, the "Angel of the Schools," the Divine Doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas, is this: "Frequent communion increases the devotion of him who receives it; but it may *sometimes* lessen respect. Hence every Christian should cultivate and possess the devotion and respect due to this greatest of sacraments; and when he perceives that frequent communion diminishes that respect, he should, in order to renew and increase it, abstain sometimes. But if he perceives that his respect, far from diminishing, increases, he should receive the Eucharist often, because a soul well disposed necessarily acquires great graces by the reception of that admirable and efficacious sacrament." Catharine, in accepting the teaching of the great Dominican, followed only the dictates of her heart, that, burning with love and charity, for ever yearned after the Spring from which they flow.

Such was the consolation she received in this Sac-

rament of Love, that on the days when she was deprived of it her whole body showed the evidences of the violent reaction to which her spirit was subjected. Her physical sufferings and grief were as real and as keen, and her sense of loneliness as pronounced on these occasions, as the ordinary human heart experiences when deprived of the companionship of a cherished loved one. In this way she was caused much unnecessary suffering by the injudicious direction of her former spiritual adviser, and of the Superior of the Sisters of Penance. When Fr. Raymond was appointed her confessor she was enabled to satisfy more frequently her craving for the Blessed Sacrament. He used every effort to gratify her longing, until finally the Sovereign Pontiff, Gregory XI., by a special bull, gave her permission to have a portable altar, and a priest assigned to her alone, so that she could at any time and any place, without further permission, hear Mass and receive Holy Communion.

Before this extraordinary privilege was granted, Catharine was accustomed to obtain permission from the Lector of the monastery, at that time Fr. Raymond, who more than any other of the religious aided her in satisfying her consuming desire for the Holy Eucharist. One day, during the morning, she as usual experienced a longing for the Blessed Sacrament; and although suffering greatly from the pain in her side, from which she was never free, she persisted in her desire; and, hoping that the pains would subside a little, she sent one of her companions to Fr. Raymond with a request to defer saying Mass for a short time, as she desired to com-

municate. The good father consented cheerfully, and retired to await her convenience. In the meantime Catharine had arrived at the church. Several of her companions, learning of her desire to approach the Holy Table, and knowing that she would remain several hours in ecstasy afterward, succeeded in dissuading her from her purpose, alleging the lateness of the hour, it being then near Tierce, and also the dislike of those in charge to keep the church open so long. Humbly acceding to their wishes, Catharine retired to the secluded end of the church, where she tried to still the anxious desire of her heart by entreating the Redeemer to come to her and dwell in her heart during the reenactment of the awful scenes of His passion; but sent word beforehand to the patient priest, who, ignorant of Catharine's arrival, was still waiting. The message delivered to him simply requested that, as Catharine would not receive on that day, he proceed at once with the Mass. Still unconscious of her presence in the church, Fr. Raymond donned the holy vestments, and going to the altar of St. Paul, at the upper end of the church and remote from Catharine, he proceeded with the sacred mysteries. When he reached that dreadful scene where the precious body of Our Lord is broken again, he divided the Host, but, instead of separating into the two parts as is usual, a third portion fell on the snow-white corporal beside the chalice over which the sacrifice is made. When he searched for it, Fr. Raymond was unable to find it; and thinking that the whiteness of the fine linen prevented him from distinguishing it, he broke another portion as is required and fin-

ished his communion. When his hands were free he sought for the particle which he had seen fall on the altar, but without success. Greatly disturbed in his mind, but not wishing to delay further the Mass, he concluded as rapidly as he could.

When all had left the church he recommenced his search more carefully, with tears flowing from his eyes from grief at this unaccountable circumstance. Notwithstanding the utter impossibility of its having fallen behind the altar or on the floor, he searched carefully every inch of the space. He could not find it. Then calling the sacristan and covering up the altar, he told him to allow no one to approach it till his return, and sought the Prior for counsel, first retiring to the sacristy to disrobe. While there Father Christopher, Prior of the Carthusians, whom he knew intimately and for whom he had a warm affection, came to him, to ask for an interview with Catharine. Fr. Raymond asked him to wait until his return from the Prior, but he answered : " To-day is a solemn fast, and I must return immediately to the monastery, which you know is a long distance from the city. Do not keep me waiting, for on my conscience I must speak with Catharine."

Telling the sacristan to remain and watch the altar till his return, the troubled Friar went with Fr. Christopher to Catharine's house, where he was astonished to learn that she was in the very church from which he had come. Returning at once, they found Catharine's companions gathered in the lower end of the church, as though waiting. On inquiring for the saint, they told him that Catharine was kneeling on one of the

benches in an ecstasy. Still annoyed and anxious about the unusual occurrence at the altar, and wishing to hasten back to renew his search, he besought them to arouse her by every means possible.

When gently she was aroused and told of the waiting priests, she took a seat beside them, and listened as Fr. Raymond recounted to the Prior the cause of his anxiety, while a curious smile illumined her face, as though she was hearing something with which she was familiar.

As he finished, Catharine asked him : "Did you not search diligently ?" And when he answered "Yes," she added quietly : "Then why should you be so greatly troubled ?" while the smile again lighted up her face. Fr. Raymond noticed it, but said nothing until the interview with the Prior was finished and he had departed. Having had time to reflect, and thinking of Catharine's curious smile, he said to her suddenly : "Mother, I really believe that *you* took the particle of consecrated Host." She humbly answered : "Nay, father, you could not accuse me of that ; it was not I, but Another. All I can say is that you will not find that particle again." Then exercising his privilege as spiritual adviser and confessor, Fr. Raymond insisted on a full explanation of what had caused him so much grief and anxiety.

"Father, I will tell you, as my confessor and the one to whom I confide my soul's welfare. Do not be further troubled about the lost particle, as it was brought to me and presented by Our Lord Jesus Christ. I yielded to the wishes of my companions here, and

did not appear for communion as I expected ; but in my grief and disappointment I took refuge in my divine Spouse, and, kneeling in the silence and obscurity of that remote corner, I cried out to Him to come and console me, to let me feel that He was near, that my soul might revel in the overflowing love which the knowledge of His presence ever bestows. Then, father, while I was absorbed thus in that one great desire, behold the Saviour appeared to me, bearing in His sacred hand the blessed particle, which, as I started forward to receive my Lord and Master, fell gently between my lips that were half opened with the joyous surprise. O father, how can I ever thank my Saviour for this glorious manifestation of His love ? "

This explanation of what seemed at first a great mystery set at rest any doubts or fears Fr. Raymond entertained. It did not astonish him greatly, for he was in a measure prepared for it, having been informed by several thoroughly reliable witnesses that on several occasions, when partaking of the Blessed Eucharist with Catharine, they had noticed that the Host seemed to leave the hands of the priest and fly between the open lips of the saint. Fr. Bartholomew, professor and Prior of the Order of St. Dominic, stated that when he attempted to give Catharine the Holy Communion, he felt the sacred Host escaping from his fingers notwithstanding all his efforts to retain it. And Fr. Raymond himself always perceived a distinct trembling of the consecrated Host when presenting it to Catharine.

Although at that time the custom of receiving fre-

quently holy communion was rare, Catharine never ceased to recommend it to all who desired to become more perfect in the sight of God. Throughout her labors for the salvation of the precious souls sent to her, she showed that nothing was so dear to her as to excite in them faith and devotion to this tremendous Mystery. She knew its value, and the graces with which its worthy reception adorns the soul.

If we could only realize the sublimity of the love that left to countless millions of human beings that legacy of salvation, and contemplate the awful scene that purchased our redemption, when we approach the mystery of the consecration and receive the Lamb of God, our very souls would stand still in mute impotency and ecstatic joy.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CLOSING SCENES IN CATHARINE'S ACTIVE LIFE.

The last months of Catharine's earthly ministry were spent, as had been revealed to her long before, in teaching priests and monks and crowned heads that Christ was ruler over all. Pope Gregory XI. was Supreme Pontiff when Catharine was called to Florence to establish peace between the warring factions that the demon of envious pride had stirred up in the hearts of men against their righteous Pastor. Despite the threats and menaces of the evil one, she remained until the successor of Gregory XI. had concluded peace with the Florentines. As soon as this was assured, that is in 1373-4, Catharine returned to Siena, where she occupied her spare time in preparing a book under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

She had made certain of her companions secretaries, and urged them to be present during her ecstasies in order that they might preserve in writing all that she would make known to them. This they did faithfully, and the result was a volume of profound truths that she had given voice to while her soul was communicating with the great Unknown. This book is known as the Dialogue. As we have it at present

it is divided into several treatises—on Discretion, Prayer, Providence, and Obedience; although there are scattered throughout her letters allusions to others, such as On Tears, which have never been found. The sublimity of the sentiment and language shown in all her writings, but more especially in the treatise on Obedience, reveals the inspiration of the divine Spirit shining through the intellect of Catharine.

This was one of the few moments of quiet that came in Catharine's life. It was but a lull between the strife and dissension of the first outbreak of rebellion, which she aided in subduing, and the fierce fires of schismatic fanaticism that were to rend the Church for forty years, which she had predicted, in which she was to take an active part, but from which she was called to use her influence for reconciliation from the regions of eternal peace.

Pope Urban VI., who had succeeded Gregory XI. as vicar of Christ, having known Catharine at Avignon when he was archbishop of Acerenza, commanded Fr. Raymond, her spiritual adviser, to summon her to Rome.

The spirit of prudence caused Catharine to at first reply to Fr. Raymond thus: "Father, several persons of Siena, and some of the Sisters of my Order, seemed to be scandalized by my frequent journeys, saying that a Religious should not be thus ever on the wing. Although these reflections on my conduct give me no concern, inasmuch as I have never undertaken a journey but by the direct inspiration of God or of His vicar, and then only to promote the salvation of

souls, yet, in order to avoid as much as possible the appearance of wrong, and thereby avoid giving any scandal to my neighbor, I beg that I be allowed to remain here. If, however, the Sovereign Pontiff wills my presence in Rome, I entreat that you obtain from him a written command, summoning me, that those who think scandal may know that I do but obey Christ's Vicar."

On receiving this reply Fr. Raymond at once presented it to His Holiness, who charged him to accede to her wishes and summon her in the name of obedience. Catharine soon after arrived with a numerous company, who had adopted the badge of poverty in order that they might the more completely throw themselves on the aid of Divine Providence, preferring to follow a beggar's life with the holy saint than enjoy abundance without her spiritual help and consolation.

The successor of St. Peter received the lowly Catharine with every mark of pleasure and respect, and testified to the veneration and esteem in which he held her by requesting that she speak before the College of Cardinals more especially on the threatening schism. Submissive alike in all things, Catharine obeyed, and spoke with the fire of inspiration, on fortitude and constancy at this most trying moment, that, inasmuch as God was watching over all their thoughts and deeds, the forbidding aspect of a threatened schism should not frighten them from pursuing the work God had given them. Taking up the theme where she had left it, His Holiness concluded the interview with these words: "Behold, brethren, how this humble woman

confounds us, we who feel the tortures of timidity, while she, slender weak woman though she be, is tranquil in the Divine grace that conviction of virtue and justice ever bestows. Let us not tremble then, in the face of this most hideous serpent. What, should the vicar of Christ quail though the whole world were to oppose him? Is not Christ the Eternal with him? He will never abandon His spouse the Church." Giving her his benediction, he returned to his heavy cross and labor.

The devil of unrest had sown broadcast his seeds of sedition and apostasy, which falling on the yielding soil of Jane's heart, at that time queen of Sicily, sprung up into open rebellion against the Church of God, and caused her to take sides with the image-destroying schismatics. At first Pope Urban thought of sending Catharine to her in company with another virgin named Catharine, a daughter of the recently canonized St. Bridget of Sweden. He hoped that the influence of these two holy women would blight with the fires of faith and truth the thorns of pride and infidelity rankling in her heart.

When Catharine heard of the proposed mission she did not shrink from the perilous task, but offered to go at once. The other Catharine, lacking the tremendous courage and abiding faith of the spouse of Christ, refused to undertake the mission. Fr. Raymond did not approve of her going, thinking the reputation of persons consecrated to God too precious to be lightly subjected to the criticism that suspicion would involve. He suggested to the Sovereign Pontiff that Queen

Jane might be so influenced by the evil counsels with which she was surrounded as to cause the two virgins to be insulted openly on their journey, if not subjected to worse indignities. His Holiness acquiesced in the justness of these suspicions, and concluded the matter by saying: "Your views are correct; it is more prudent for them not to go."

When Catharine was informed of this determination, although quite ill at the time, she said to Fr. Raymond: "Ah, had Agnes, Margeret, and a multitude of other virgins indulged in all these reflections, they would never have obtained the crown of martyrdom! Have we not a Spouse who can deliver us from the hands of the impious, and preserve our honor among a throng of debauchees? All these reasonings are vain; they spring from a want of faith rather than from genuine prudence."

Feeling inwardly the self-reproof that the truth of her words aroused, Fr. Raymond remained silent; and the subject was not resumed.

Being informed of the possibility of winning Charles V., King of France, from the schism that his royal highness had excited, Pope Urban concluded to send Fr. Raymond on that delicate mission. Grieved at heart to think of leaving Catharine, whom he revered as a saint, the Friar sought counsel of her at once, feeling certain that she too would be afflicted at parting with her confessor. But, as might have been expected of that inspired soul, she said to him quietly: "Father, hasten at once to obey; be certain that he is truly the Vicar of Christ. I desire that you expose yourself in

sustaining him, as you should for the Catholic faith alone."

Although having no doubts on the subject, Fr. Raymond gathered new courage from Catharine's words, and in all his subsequent combats in the defence of the rights of the Sovereign Pontiff he was sustained by recalling them. When his departure was definitely arranged, Catharine called Fr. Raymond to her, for, with her spirit of prophecy, she perceived the future, and desired to speak to him concerning some revelations she had received from God. After having conversed with him for several hours, she said to him, in those solemn, sweet tones that rang with the earnestness of truth : "Now go whither God calls you. I think that in this life we shall never again discourse together as we have done just now." For this reason undoubtedly Catharine went to the place where he was to embark, in order to bid him a last farewell. As the ship was about to sail she knelt a moment in silent prayer, then made the sign of the cross over their bended heads, and Fr. Raymond could almost read in her face the words her heart spoke: "Go, my son, in safety, shielded by the blessed sign; in this life thou shalt never again behold thy Mother." Her prediction was verified. Fr. Raymond never saw her again, for on his return her life's labors were ended.

Guided by Divine Providence, Fr. Raymond passed through all the perils of the high seas, at that time infested with pirates and those Judases of the Church the schismatics, who were flocking to Avignon. Arrived at Genoa, Fr. Raymond sent word to the Sover-

eign Pontiff of his arrival, and of the condition of affairs, and asked for instructions. He was commanded to remain and preach a mission against the rampant lunacy of the schismatics. While he was thus engaged, using all his talents in behalf of his poor suffering mother the Church, and battling with the rising tide of rebellion against his Sovereign Pontiff, the soul of his cherished Mother in the Order of St. Dominic departed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

In the midst of all the violent passions, dissensions, and persecutions with which Satan was tearing the heart of the Church she loved so well, and for which she had offered herself as a willing victim during her whole life, the crowning martyrdom of Catharine's life commenced. She saw the Vicars of Jesus Christ surrounded by the demons of sedition and rebellious spirits, who, forgetting years of beneficent ministrations, had cast aside all semblance of obedience or faith. Spurred on by the Evil One, they even threatened the life of the Sovereign Pontiff. Ah, well did she recognize the hand of the destroying angel, who, finding that the schism he had provoked might still be healed, sought, by letting loose all his furies among the faithful ones, to drive them from their allegiance and destroy their Sovereign.

Seeing this, her tears flowed night and day, and in the solitude of her cell she never ceased to pour forth supplications for the Faith that, torn and bleeding, lay trampled in the dust while exultant devils swarmed about, dragging the fatuous souls down to Hell. Ah, what tortures did she not suffer—she, the spouse of

Christ, the husband of the Church, the pure willing victim for the evils of men, wedding the interests of the Tabernacle of Christ's love, that Tabernacle for which she had loved all her life, and for which she was prepared to die, smelled not by inbred hearts, but by the Judaistic spurious ring, while partaking of the precious body of Christ, sought to betray His trust!

Kneeling out her pure love arms to surround and comfort, her tender body racked with grief and pain, and her very soul shaking from the ghastly form and voice appealing eyes, Catherine cried out: "O Creator, most adored God, Thou knowest how Thy beloved Church, to whom Thou didst give Thy precious blood that redeemed the world, lies in the throes of mortal conflict with the enemy of man, who seeks to steal her heart in hand, and with the scourge of humiliation and pain during Thy time. O Eternal Wisdom, save Thy holy Church and people from this awful peril, that would tear from them the fruits of Calvary. O unutterable Essence, turn and look Thy children in their wickedness, leading them to the table of the tempting demon; but lift Thine eye in pity upon Thy heart in agony, and let Thy outraged justice fall on me the humble vessel that would bear the stains of ambition, suffering, and death." Hearing no denying answer in her heart, Catherine's senses left her frail body in the fury of the soul-flight.

Her prayer was answered. From that time the great uprising of militant greatly subsided, and finally died away. The cardinals at Avignon, near the papal residence, hitherto in possession of the ecclesiastics, and

from which they had descended on the city and ravaged the country, was wrested from them, and their leaders perished. Then, in gratitude to God for His mercy, the vicar of Christ walked barefoot to the great basilica, followed by all the faithful, chanting the Magnificat.

Meanwhile the holy Catharine was slowly bending under the ceaseless agony that, since her last spiritual contest for the life of the Church and Christ's vicar, afflicted her body, on which the powers of darkness seemed to be venting their rage. Exhausted by the physical and mental strain that the horrors of a schism had subjected her to, her sufferings increased daily; and although they had reduced her to a living corpse, so fearfully did the wasted flesh reveal the feeble frame within, still she struggled bravely on beneath the heavy cross that love of God, of Church, and of man had placed upon her; ceasing not for a moment her devotions to the One who not only carried His cross, but died in agony upon it. While she was enduring the final martyrdom of her body, that was to crown her martyr's life, her spirit likewise was subjected to all the torments that the prince of darkness could invent; she heard the furious demons shrieking in her ears: "Cursed be thou that thinkest to escape us! Through all thy life thou didst pursue us, hoping to avert thereby the wrath eternal; but now we have a hold on thee if only once thou didst offend thy Creator. Cease then thy useless struggles, for we will surely wrench thy feeble life away, and drag thy wretched soul down to the lowest depths of hell, away from the sight of thy offended God."

Tortured thus in mind and body, Catharine would daily draw her tottering, wasted, aching frame along the long weary road that led from her cell to St. Peter's, thence up to the altar of her spouse and Master, and, with the tears welling up from her faithful heart, consume her feeble flickering strength in contrite grief, and in supporting herself while receiving the precious Body and Blood, humbly kneeling at her Saviour's feet; for when with Him no evil voices reached her, and in His presence her anxious heart found peace. Those who saw the thin, frail body of the saintly Catharine extended on the narrow wooden cot could well appreciate that it was only the sublimity of the soul sustained by Divine grace that enabled her to support with joyful courage this supreme trial, and await with patient faith the appointed hour.

Among the faithful ones who watched with her in this time of sorrow, Alessia was best entitled to be called her sister ; not because of her seniority, but by reason of her perfection. Having lost her husband, who was noted for his nobility of character and learning, shortly after their nuptials, she turned to God for consolation ; and He sent her Catharine, to whom she became so attached that finally she renounced her wealth, and distributed it to the poor, in order that she might the better learn of God's love and mercy by following in the footsteps of His accepted spouse. She fasted, watched, and prayed, like her saintly mistress, and made such rapid progress in the path of perfection that Catharine, in the latter portion of her life, confided to her many precious secrets, and signified her

wish that when she was no more Alessia should take her place, and be a model for the Sisterhood.

Next to her, perhaps, Sister Frances was most tenderly beloved—a widow, who, though poor in worldly riches, yet gave to the Church she loved so well her three priceless gems, her sons; who, in the habit of St. Dominic's Preaching Friars, yielded up their lives in God's service during the plague.

Then the gentle Lysa, though still young, and a near relation, gave promise that the lessons taught her by Catharine would be a fruitful source of consolation to many weary souls.

There the patient Brothers stood who long and faithfully had served the Blessed Catharine, and defended her, and from her drew their knowledge of God's love. One was Brother Saint, so called partly because of his name, and wholly by reason of his life. He had left his home and country, and sought as a pilgrim in a strange land the solitude his soul craved for in the contemplation of the Creator. Near Siena he had stayed his lonesome journey, and pursued his recluse life undisturbed. In his old age he found in Catharine's teachings what he had vainly sought alone, and leaving his solitary cell and life, he followed her who taught him how to love his neighbor and thereby worship God.

Another bright follower of the "spouse of Christ" was Brother Barduccio, who to the wisdom of his age added the angelic purity of his childhood; and for this the holy Catharine esteemed and respected him. He did not long survive the patroness for whom he too had sacrificed parents, home, and country.

To Stephen Maconi, or Brother Stephen, was reserved the privilege of writing Catharine's many letters and her book. As secretary he followed Catharine everywhere, and treasured up her lightest words and most instructive conversations, as well as all that transpired during her ecstasies and at her death; with the aid of Brother Barduccio and the monk Neri, he committed these to writing, that future generations might learn from the life and actions of his beloved Mother a certain way to life eternal. Before her death Catharine called him to her and said: "My son, the will of God is that you renounce the world and become a Carthusian." He followed the suggestion of the saint, which must have been inspired, for he rose rapidly to be Prior, and for years directed many convents of the Order.

The monk Neri was one of the first to renounce all his worldly goods and ties, and follow Catharine, in person as in precept, till her death. After writing of her noble life and holy death with the other faithful Brother, he retired in grief to the solitary life of a hermit's cell.

Calling these devoted followers around her, St. Catharine assigned to each separately the vocation most suited to his or her nature. For some she prescribed a religious Habit, for others a solitary hermit's contemplative existence. For the Sisters of Penance she designated Alessia as Superior. Having spoken to each in turn, and through the inspiration of the Holy Ghost directed their future welfare, she pleaded their forgiveness, and gave them her blessing in return.

CHAPTER XXV.

HER DEATH.

Now the first dim shadows of that sombre valley whose threshold the helpless feet of Blessed Catharine pressed, began to slowly rise around the feeble, wasted figure, whose little spark of life their dews would dampen and extinguish, leaving the soul to wing its way above them to eternity.

Realizing that her little span of life would soon be resting on the other shore, Catharine caused her faithful children to be summoned, that they might hear her parting exhortation, and in their presence she might pass away.

When they were gathered around her lowly cot, she said to them: "He who gives himself to God, if he desires to possess Him in return, must divest his heart of worldly love, not only for all creatures, but all earthly goods, in order that his soul may the more surely find its way to the Creator free, untrammelled in its sweet simplicity. The only way that this can be accomplished is by prayer, founded on humility, which, while acknowledging the nothingness of the body, lifts the soul to God. There being two kinds of prayer, both must be employed. Mental prayer is the food on

which all virtue increases and fortifies itself, and without which it would become weak and finally lost. Vocal prayer should be practised at certain hours; but mental prayer should be continual, and shown in all our thoughts and words and deeds."

She told them that by faith alone they would be made to understand that whatever happened to them came from God, and proceeded from His immense love for His creatures, and this would excite in them a love for His wisdom, and a promptitude in obeying His commands, whether these came from Him directly or through those in authority over them; that in these commands were involved the necessary means of their salvation, and for increasing the virtues of their souls. She declared to them that, in order to acquire purity of mind, it was necessary to beware of judging unfavorably of one's neighbor, and to abstain from all idle words concerning his conduct; for in all creatures they must behold the will of God. She particularly recommended to them never to despise or condemn any one with harsh judgment, even though they should see him commit a fault. If sometimes evil is evident, we should take compassion on him who commits it, and pray for him without passing judgment on his act. Then she spoke to them of Divine Providence, and of the absolute confidence they must repose in Him. As she and all present had experienced, God had always provided for their necessities. She added that those who trust in Divine Providence shall not only experience special aid, but will never be abandoned.

Thus she instructed her spiritual children, giving

them wise counsel ; and when her failing voice warned them that her strength was slowly ebbing, she gave them the last exhortation of the Saviour to His disciples : to humbly and earnestly love one another, that by their mutual affection they would prove themselves her spiritual children, and preserve the tie that bound them to her as mother ; and in so doing they would prove her glory and her crown ; and she would intercede for them, that God would bless them as He had blessed her. She commanded them, in the name of charity, to address continual and fervent prayers for the peace and prosperity of the holy Church, and for the vicar of Christ. This had been her ever-present thought for many years ; and in the latter part of her life she endured much grievous pain and trials that this might be granted her. She added that, as God had permitted Satan to overwhelm Job with every variety of ill in order to prove His servant, so it seemed to her that he was now allowed to harass her poor body with many torments, in order that, as she said, her soul might be the more readily freed from its obscure prison, and following the design and disposition of her beloved Spouse, return to Him who had so favored her.

Her weeping children gathered closer to her, for the agony of which she had just spoken was stifling in her breast the voice they loved so well, and they would not lose a word of her last utterance. Seeing that their hearts were torn with sorrow, again she raised with painful effort her voice in consolation, saying : "Beloved children, you ought not to be afflicted at my death ; you should rather rejoice and con-

gratulate me, because I am to quit this land of exile. and repose in the unending peace of God. I give you positive assurance that I shall be more useful to you after my death than I would or could have been by remaining with you here, where life is so obscured by grief and miseries. Nevertheless, I commend my whole being into the hands of my beloved Spouse ; and if He perceives that I can be useful to any living creature, and so wills it, I gladly will remain amid anguish and torture, for the honor of His name and the salvation of my neighbor. Aye, and suffer thus a hundred deaths if it could be of avail to but one lost soul. Ah, dear children, *it is a special benediction from Almighty God that I have been permitted to give my life for the Church.*"

Then falling back upon her couch of wood, from which the faithful Alessia had raised her, while she lavished her remaining strength in words of love, of consolation, and in praise of God, Catharine lay there with trembling, clasped hands and twitching features as she entered deeper into the blackness and agony of the coming end. Thus she remained in conflict with the powers of darkness, while the convent bell had twice announced an hour gone for ever, the fearful silence being broken only by the sobs that burst from the faithful loving hearts watching there. As she remained like one all but dead, the only sign of life a short and feeble breathing, it was decided best to give to her the Sacrament of Extreme Unction. This was administered by the Abbot of St. Anthimo, at which time she appeared to be unconscious. Though

at first no change was noticed, some time after the ghastly lips were seen to move, muttering some words of Latin, while the feeble motion of the hands showed that her spirit was returning from that fearful contest, with another parting message of love and hope for those to be left behind. Slowly the light of life shone again from the depths of the hitherto extinct eyes, the deep lines of agony on the troubled face softened to a smile, and the wondering stricken ones about her thought for a moment that a miracle was to give them back their Mother, until they heard these words : " Come to my aid, O God. O Lord, make haste to help me." Then : " O God, have mercy on me ; take not from me the memory of Thee." Then after a moment she slowly moved her head as though denying what some whispering devil uttered, saying : " Vain glory—never ; but for the true glory of Christ crucified."

They raised her up that she might see the crucifix hanging near some saintly relics and some holy images they had brought ; and gazing on it, her voice gained strength, and lifting it she cried : " Almighty God, adorable Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to Thee I cry for mercy and forgiveness. Often, O patient Father, have I transgressed the general laws Thy wisdom gave to us, as well as those special commands Thy love confided to me alone. I have not loved Thee nor my neighbor with the fulness that Thy law demands, and therefore merit Thy just anger for my ingratitude, neglect, and disobedience. O Blessed Saviour, Son of God, my Spouse, Thou didst call me to seek out and

save men's souls, to leave my woman's nature as a garb behind me, and, sustained by Thee, bring out of darkness those straying lost ones still so dear to Thee ; and I have answered Thy appeal by seeking first my own consolation, and did not abandon myself as freely as I should have done to Thy divine desires. Had I, O my Redeemer, heeded better Thy most precious counsels, and given up my every hour to bitter tears and severe penance and faithful, earnest prayer, then perhaps Thy Church had not been torn asunder, and the faithful driven like sheep in a blinding storm. O Holy Spirit, Thou Comforter, Thou gavest me these loving hearts that I might lead them in the way of truth and enlighten them by the words Thou didst inspire in me ; and see how have I neglected to give them an example of a perfect life, or taught all the truths Thou didst impart to me ! I have not borne the pains and torments of my mind and body with the faith and love and gratitude they merited. I have not reverenced as I should the wonderful gifts of grace Thou didst accord me. And Thou, most tender, faithful Spouse who chose me when a little child, how have I served Thee ! I have not kept my memory full of Thee, nor have I sufficiently fixed my will on Thine. O God, I have not loved Thee as I should ; and now before the veil of time is rent, and I appear before Thy awful judgment-seat, listen to my prayer for pardon, and let the heart-ache that the knowledge of my sins has caused me ascend with my last breath ; and when the stifling hand of death closes my utterance forever, receive my unworthy soul."

Thus that stainless soul accused itself. Turning to the waiting priest she said: "Father, absolve me, for the love of our Redeemer, from all the sins I have confessed to thee before my Creator, as well as from all others that my guilty soul has forgotten." Then the gentle, white-haired man of God raised his hands in supplication to the eternal Throne of Mercy, and bestowed upon the dying Catharine the absolution that Heaven gave through him.

"Father, once again absolve, that I may receive with the body of my Spouse the indulgence granted by the Sovereign Pontiff to me." For, like a heaven-born flower, she thirsted for all the refreshing dews God's love bestows.

The faint tinkle of the sanctus bell came to the listening ears of the expiring Catharine, as the sacred Host was borne slowly through the prostrate penitents, whose grief was hushed in the presence of God. When that last and most precious Sacrament of God's love, the Holy Eucharist, which was to bear fruit through all eternity, was placed between her waiting lips, it seemed to soothe the famished soul within, which, beating on the prison-bars of earthly existence, was seeking to escape to the eternal springs of divine love above; for her voice again sank to a whisper, and the light that, but a moment before, burned brilliantly in the eyes that had looked on God, began to fade, as they sought a sobbing, white-haired, feeble, broken form on which her dying hand had slowly descended for the last time, and whose loved name she whispered in a blessing—her mother.

The shadows of the valley roll down closer; their dews of dissolution mingle with the sacred oil on that saintly brow; the fluttering wings of God's last earthly messenger send a quiver through that wasted form, tremble for a moment in the glassy eye; then lightly laying gentle hands upon that faithful heart, still its beating for all time, leaving the imprisoned soul to fly to God.

Above the sobs and suppressed moans that burst from the hearts of her afflicted orphans as the last words of the litany they recited merged into that tender, sweet prayer of parting, "Salve Regina," arose the solemn tones of the convent bell, announcing the passing of an hour consecrated to God, and with it the soul of Catharine.

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